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FREEDOM IN EDUCATION

THOUGHTS PROVOKED BY MR. BANTOCK

MR. G. H. BANTOCK'S article on 'Freedom in Education' in the last number of *Scrutiny* was so clearly intended to provoke stock-taking rather than to command immediate agreement that he will not object, I am sure, if I attempt some stock-taking at his expense and do not always appear to be doing justice to his case. At any rate it would not be in place to argue the matter point by point, and I would prefer to consider some aspects of the problem from what I must assume to be a different point of view from Mr. Bantock's—his is a point of view I don't find it easy to locate, for all his wish to be seen in company with Matthew Arnold as a 'Liberal tempered by experience, reflection and renouncement' and as a 'believer in culture'.

As a start, and even though most readers of this article will already have read Mr. Bantock's, I think it best to indicate very briefly (and hence inadequately, I am afraid) the case he advances. 'The current agitation about education would appear reassuring', he writes, were it not that one is forced to suspect that 'the emphasis on experiment conceals a basic uncertainty' and, on the part of the teacher, an 'unwillingness to impose a view of life'. The particular symptoms of this abdication are firstly that 'the emphasis is placed on the children', that the child is regarded as 'the end of education'; and secondly and closely related to this first point, that Freedom and Spontaneity are put forward as guiding ideals (as, for instance, in the uncritical advocacy of the Project Method). The consequence of all this is a 'careless abandonment of our hard-won values at the behest of a sentimental concern for the more immediate interests and needs of the individual'; whereas the teacher ought, by rights, to be 'one of the few civilizing influences in our vulgarized social order'.

Now from this rough summary, which I have tried to present as far as possible in quotation, this thesis can be seen to have a great deal in it calculated to commend itself to the '*Scrutiny* reader': much of the phraseology and many of the references appear with the appropriate watermark. Yet it is a thesis about which I can't feel happy, at any rate as presented by Mr. Bantock. Partly this is due to an ungainly style which slops over far too often into footnotes (over 4 pages of them out of a total of only 15½). This untidiness of manner goes with a disquieting readiness to talk educational theory, a species of talk which in general is far too loosely related to educational practice (and because of which I hope to be forgiven if I concentrate on personal experiences later in this essay). Moreover, phrases like 'the highest values mankind has

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discovered' no doubt indicate the sort of thing Mr. Bantock believes in, but, in the context he gives them, they sound too easily constructed. In short, for all the gaggle of Aunt Sallies he rounds up and then knocks down, his argument seems based on a situation not clearly enough grasped or defined.

This emerges most plainly in the inadequacy of his *prescriptions*, for the contemporary situation is not hard to diagnose. It is surely not sufficient simply to rest on one's cultural oars, while stroking a *Scrutiny* Eight. To proclaim one's belief in civilized standards and leave the matter on that lofty level, does not in itself provide an alternative to the methods advocated by the apostles of Freedom. Nor, for all the mathematics of the business, do positives necessarily emerge out of an assortment of negatives, such as 'I would be sorry if it were thought that the alternative I suggest is a return to the "beat-their-backsides" school of pedagogic thought', or 'I do not wish to imply that Mr. Neill may not do good therapeutic work with a particular type of child', or 'I am not here concerned with the project method adequately handled', or 'It may be necessary consciously to accept limited ends'. Mr. Bantock might well reply that he was not concerned, in this essay, to provide the alternatives; and this I am sure would be a reasonable claim. The difficulty is that the terms in which he states his attack repeatedly invite an enquiry as to what he proposes instead, not so much because one wants to know in detail as because his manner seems to imply, to hint at, attitudes and practices that would not be at all acceptable. What, for example, is one to make of the statement, referring to the teacher, that 'The whole unwillingness to impose a view of life merely means that a worse view will be adopted, for a child cannot live in a vacuum'? What alternative, for the working teacher, can lurk behind a statement which reveals such inadequate social analysis, such bad logic, and so elementary a confusion over the relation between educational purposes and methods? For if the phrase means anything, it implies that the teacher to-day refuses to impose a view of life which lies ready to his eye; it implies, moreover, that the right thing for a teacher to do with a view of life is to *impose* it; and finally it implies that the view of life which would seek to fill the vacuum is *necessarily* worse than the teacher's (undefined) way of life. All of which reminds me of the story told by Raymond O'Malley, how some years ago one of the Dartington Hall parents, himself a noted literary genius, complained repeatedly that nothing effective was being done to rid his twelve-year-old son of his regrettable weakness for detective novels and to train him to be a literary genius in his turn. Forced to choose between the two, Raymond O'Malley came down on the side of the detective novels, with the result that the son was eventually removed from so lax an institution and sent post-haste to Eton, where a far better view of life was doubtless imposed.

That we live to-day, teachers and pupils and the rest of us, in a society whose standards are shallow and shifting is hardly likely to be disputed by any reader of *Scrutiny*. This is one way

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of putting it. Alternatively one might say that if standards imply tradition, we live in a society which seems intent on getting on without them, substituting in their place the blandishments of convenience and compromise. Now this, obviously enough, means that the educational system tends to a superficiality, and also that it is liable to seek refuge in the over-muscular bosom of vocational-training. In so far as they have been the qualities that, for the last century, have made for social success and commercial power, our educational system has been so organized as to foster individual opportunism and spiritual arrogance.

But this is not Mr. Bantock's main charge. Though he says early on that 'The emphasis on experiment, one comes to suspect, conceals a basic uncertainty . . . an unconscious attempt to cover insufficiency by surface agitation', he ends with the statement already quoted, about the 'unwillingness to impose a view of life'. Surely, one would have thought, there is something creditable in being chary of imposing a view of life at a time of uncertainty, when it is all too easy to do; let alone in being unwilling to impose what one may well not possess. That we should, *as a society*, lack a firm moral foundation is what has to be deplored; and it is a plight that will not quickly be cured by individual teachers imposing on their pupils whatever view of life they may personally hold or happen upon. It is just because such views of life as they have receive no social backing (unless they are of the crudest kind), and because the nature of contemporary society is to isolate people and discourage the emergence of coherent communal groupings, that most teachers, like most other people, are bound either to have a sense of limited and uncertain authority or else to resort to a bumptious self-importance. In neither case would one recommend that they should *impose* their views on others. If standards of value are to be fostered, it ought necessarily to be by a very different process from the one apparently advocated by Mr. Bantock. And I do not believe that it would be wise of Mr. Bantock to *impose* upon his student-teachers even his own point of view, for all its affinities with Matthew Arnold's, lest they carry off with them to their schools more Brimstone and Fire than Sweetness and Light.

In joining issue with Mr. Bantock on this issue of 'imposition', I am not wishing to differ from him in holding that 'some ideas are more valuable than others'. Indeed, I would be prepared to accept that belief as the basis of any genuine educational under-taking. What I am questioning immediately are his implied *methods*. I do not believe that one can bring people, not just to see that 'some ideas are more valuable than others', but above all to be capable of assessing at first-hand which are the more valuable, through a process that can in any sense be described as an imposition. For the ability to apprehend value is not a matter of being stamped with a pattern: it is something that comes slowly with trial-and-error. This means that one has to place one's pupil face-to-face with the particular problem in such a way that he has himself to pass judgment and then appreciate the consequences of

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making a mistake. But having said this much, I am bound to add that, in teaching, method is never just method; in the last resort it betokens an attitude of mind. For this reason, my agreement with Mr. Bantock about standards of value does not extend very far. For having assented to the belief that 'some ideas are more valuable than others', I find myself registering dissatisfaction with a phrase that comes shortly afterwards by way of amplification, where he speaks slightingly of 'that outlook that regards taste, for instance, as something essentially relative, and the phrase "I like it" as the first and last words in literary criticism'. While I believe profoundly that taste is not relative, I am inclined to think that the *first* and *last* words in artistic criticism must necessarily be 'I like it' or 'I don't like it'. Unless one is capable of an initial response to the work of art (later one may reject it), no amount of analysis or demonstration, let alone imposing of a point of view, can strike home. And however convincing the demonstration may be, at the end it requires the counter-signature of the individual's affirmation or rejection. In short, standards of value cannot be proved. The proof can only begin when the person has sufficiently responded in the first place to know that he is faced with something that demands a judgment, which he may well indicate by saying 'I like it' or 'I don't like it'. And when the proof has ended, when the door has been opened as wide as it will go, the person has still to make his own final act of apprehension. For while matters of value are not relative, they have, in a sense, to be recreated each time. Thus, while agreeing with Mr. Bantock about the *fact* of values, I do not fancy the terms in which he discusses them: and I suspect that this dissatisfaction is not simply a matter of terminology.

As I have suggested above, the job of teaching a person artistic values, or as I would prefer to put it, helping him to develop a sense of values, is hard because one has to strike a balance between what one can show him by way of analysis and what he has to grasp for himself. The difficulty here is to work out one's own status in relation to the pupil during these two distinct processes, for in one I have to be the more active and in the other the more reticent of the two of us. It is not easy to switch from one to the other, or at any rate for the pupil to respond to such a switch. Almost inevitably the sudden reticence gives him a feeling that one ought to help him more, that one is withholding a vital clue just when he needs it; and this suspicion makes him hesitant just when he should be summoning up his courage. It is when one has realized the nature of the problem in this way, that one can begin to work out the methods which may enable one to solve it.

In attempting this both for literature and painting, I have found it best to keep the two teaching processes quite distinct from one session to the next. Thus in the first period, I have given the group (for this work is best done in a group, and not with an individual pupil) a set of texts or of pictures with which they are probably unfamiliar. At the very outset I ask them to pass a judgment on the set, to place them in what seems to be their order

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of merit—it is a good idea, I have found, to get each person to make out his own order and then, awarding marks for each place, to calculate the order for the group as a whole. I then continue in an almost mechanical way, giving no opinions myself, but simply asking people to justify their preferences: 'Let us take C first, as it was the most popular; who had C at the top of their list? Alright, Jones, why did you put it top, what did you like about it?' He stumbles for a bit, until one or two others help him. Then one invites dissent from those who had C at the bottom of their list. And so on through the whole set of texts or paintings (one can't manage more than four or five in a session), playing off likes against dislikes and one example against another; but throughout acting, *apparently*, as no more than a distributing machine of other people's ideas. Finally, I like to get the group to vote again.

A free-for-all of this kind does not at first seem very profitable; far too much nonsense is usually talked by way of justifying ill-considered preferences. It may even be that no-one has a much clearer grasp of values at the end. None the less, such a session has proved valuable because, in the first place, it forces people to expose themselves, it reveals to them on what slender grounds they hold their likes and dislikes. Secondly, it makes the group look at their texts or at the paintings far more intently than they normally do and far more inquiringly, with the invariable result that they come to like examples that they earlier disliked or didn't notice, or they find other examples becoming feeble and unimpressive. And thirdly, after a series of such sessions, the group find that certain methods of approach prove more useful than others and gradually they work out for themselves a technique and vocabulary of analysis. All these three points tend to be demonstrated very clearly in the final vote, when, in my experience, the group's order changes. It may not change for the better, though almost always it does to some extent; but the very fact of change itself demonstrates that the discussion and increased familiarity have had a result, that even in the short space of forty-five minutes people have to change their minds because they initially made them up inadequately. Over a period, free sessions of this kind produce really excellent results. And this is particularly so if one intersperses them with demonstration sessions by the teacher himself, again based on a set of comparative examples, again inviting the group to record their view, but in this case doing the analysis mainly oneself.

This combination of teaching and of arranging for the pupils to teach themselves was tried out with considerable success in a school for adults where I worked during the war. The school provided a one-month residential course in Artistic Studies, designed to help people enjoy art with discrimination and to have a sense of the values it embodies. The students who came did not have to produce any technical qualifications but only enough enthusiasm for their particular art (painting, literature, music, or drama) to have managed to procure a vacancy. As a result they ranged from university graduates to people who had not even taken school

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certificate, from some who were finished musicians to some who summed up their interest in literature by saying that they 'read a little'. For more than half their time, the students worked in one of the four specialist syndicates very much in the kind of way indicated above. But in addition all the students, whatever their specialist interests, had to spend about a quarter of the course on a group project based on a play by Shakespeare. Each group, about twenty strong, was made up of mixed specialists, so that there were musicians, artists, literature and drama students in each of them. The object of this piece of work was primarily to set the students a problem which they would have to solve largely by themselves, an undertaking of obvious value not only on its own account, but particularly in relation to the rest of the course. Also we were anxious, and this is the relevant point here, that the students should have to undergo an exercise in artistic understanding and evaluation: their work in the project would provide a commentary on the value of the specialist training they were receiving in the rest of the course.

And so each group was given its own play; we selected *Macbeth*, *Antony*, *Lear* and *The Tempest*. Its instructions were to work out, during the allotted week, 'a commentary on the play in dramatic terms, to last for thirty minutes'. What precisely this might mean was largely left to each group to find out for itself, though, during the first two days of the project, the students were given some assistance in the shape of three talks about Shakespeare's drama, concentrating particularly on the verse and on the nature of the imagery, and drawing attention to the aspect of the mature play which Wilson Knight has referred to as 'an expanded metaphor'. For the rest, the group worked on its own. When one remembers that the students to whom this formidable task was set were not all specialists in literature, that in each group of twenty not more than five appeared to have any particular familiarity with Shakespeare, one may justifiably wonder what kind of embarrassing hash the groups made of their thirty-minute performance. Some of them failed badly: a feeble potted performance of the 'story'. But most of them (and I saw eleven group performances in all) were not only successful as pieces of theatre; they revealed a degree of understanding of the play or of a particular facet of the play which one seldom finds on the professional stage and not often in mature literature students in the ordinary course of teaching. The kind of thing that the 'commentary in dramatic terms' produced was, for instance, a projection of Macbeth's inner struggle in the form of two separate persons, two Macbeths on the stage; another performance concentrated on isolating and expounding the element of unnatural evil; a performance, which was a dramatic tour-de-force, in which Lear's madness was enacted as a stylized moral commentary on his profound sanity; a treatment of *Antony* as if it were a morality play, accompanied by a disembodied commentary voicing Modern Incomprehension. It is not easy, nor can it be convincing, to describe these very amateur performances in this rough

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way. I have done so to this extent only in order to give an indication of the seriousness with which these virtually uninformed groups went about a task which we on the staff felt at first was far too difficult for them. We had even said to each other, beforehand, that the projects might well fail when it came to the final performance; but that the work they would involve (for the group had to think out its own commentary, design and make the stage setting and costumes, arrange the incidental music, and finally produce the whole performance) would amply justify the experiment. We were mistaken, and gladly so, for the performances did not fail, they were not crude or 'ham'; and they demonstrated conclusively, what the students afterwards affirmed, that the project work had proved immensely exciting, that it had given them a most important opportunity for joint creative effort. Above all that they had 'discovered' Shakespeare to a degree that they would not have believed possible, because for one week they had lived inside and around and about the play they had been set.

I have so far been considering methods of teaching artistic subjects, where one is necessarily involved in imparting a sense of values. It will be plain that I believe such a task to demand a subtler and above all a more sympathetic approach than Mr. Bantock's generalized discussion seems to imply. And while this difference between us may appear superficially to be a difference over teaching-methods, I suspect, as I have already said, that it goes deeper than this. For where he does make concrete suggestions, I find myself dissenting: 'Moreover, mature interests that the teacher can see the need of much more readily than the child—*playing the piano, for instance*—usually involve initial drudgery that may well have to be *imposed* on the young *if their good is to be pursued*', a statement which I have italicised in order to bring out what seems to me both its heavy-handed pedagogy and also its artistic crudity. But of course most teachers take subjects where moral issues or the profounder educational purposes are not immediately evident. Unquestionably the great majority of teachers of arithmetic or elementary French or history are content to do a limited task of instruction; they are no more bothered with the cultural verities than the ordinary run of bank-clerks or shop-assistants. Now while this is understandable enough, granted the fact that teachers are not basically a different genus from others and that they may have had only the uncertain advantages of a training-college education, I believe that it is a deplorable state of affairs which could well have received the full brunt of Mr. Bantock's negative attentions. Not that I want to suggest that any and every subject in the curriculum can be made the vehicle of one's moral convictions, but that they can at least provide invaluable clues to the kind of mental world we inhabit and to the intellectual conventions we find it essential to elaborate. Thus, to throw out a hint of what I mean, it is often supposed that Facts like the multiplication tables and simple arithmetic, irregular verbs and the dates of history are all things that 'simply have to be learnt by

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heart', like the drudgery of learning scales on the piano, no doubt. It is this attitude, I suspect, which produces so many children who 'just can't do maths.' or 'just have no knack for languages' or 'are hopeless at history', let alone the droves who certainly can't play the piano. This convenient faith in children's Blind Spots is in reality a way of rationalizing the consequences of teaching these subjects in the wrong way. If a child is shown that numerical relations are not a factual law of the universe but an intellectual convention, that the 'facts of history' are only a selection made and interpreted according to a given system of beliefs and from a given standpoint, and that irregular verbs are a fact only to the extent that they are seen as a product of social and cultural processes: if in this fashion (though suitably presented, of course) each subject is treated as a system of a particular kind, subserving certain ends and bearing distinct relations to material reality, many children find their feet far more quickly. They develop a confidence about the new subject in proportion as they understand the kind of thing it is; and this can provoke sufficient excitement and wonder to help them take the drudgery in their stride. In order to treat his subject in this way, however, the teacher will need to have a considerable interest in experimental teaching-methods.

Left to his own devices, the arithmetic or languages teacher can do a good deal to develop in his pupils an alert and critical intelligence. But it is a waste that such teachers should be left to themselves, because the full potentialities of their subjects are far more easily realized where the education of the school is treated as a developing whole, divisible only for the sake of convenience into distinct ends or distinct subjects or distinct themes. This approach if often the natural outcome of a system which keeps the child in the centre of the picture. Because each child is an entity, the education which is built around the child is most often a unified affair as well. It is true enough, as Mr. Bantock suggests, that it is possible to hide one's purposelessness in a haze of sentimentality about the sanctity of the child's spontaneous impulses. On the other hand, it is my experience that a clear sense of educational direction may best achieve its purpose through what Mr. Bantock stigmatizes as the cult of Freedom and Spontaneity.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of this that I have met was a school in Palestine, a Jewish school attached to the Settlement of Mishmar Haemek which looks out over the light brown and green Plain or Esdrailon. It is an attractive school in appearance, white and sharp-edged on the side of the hills and set among gardens of exotic flowers. We arrived there unexpectedly one afternoon at a time when the children were lying about the lawns and in their rooms with an air of indolent possession. We asked a girl if any of the staff would show us around; she went off to find out and returned to say that someone would join us in ten minutes in the dining-hall. This proved to be a fine large room, very well lit, and capable of seating about two hundred. Four or five children of about twelve to fourteen, apparently under the supervision of a

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girl of about sixteen, were laying the tables: a row of pink and white check cloths stretched out in front of us with blue, yellow and red bakelite plates and cruets lined up neatly from one table to the next, so that the room had about it a bright and gay orderliness. We sat down and the children brought us tea and bread and salad as if we always came here at this time of day for a meal. By the time the young teacher joined us, a good deal of his story had already been told by what we had seen about us.

Mishmar Haemek is not just an educational experiment. It is primarily a most important link in a clearly defined scheme of life, and as such it understands very precisely its social function and has devized its character and teaching to this end. It is one of the few secondary schools for the Hatzair Hashomir Settlements in Palestine, a group which represents the left-wing of the Jewish Labour movement and until recently advocated a Jewish-Arab state. All these Settlements provide their own education up to about the fourteen-year standard. After that, or even earlier, as many children as can be accommodated go to the secondary schools which are invariably attached to a Settlement for the sake of administrative convenience and also for defence. The main task of these schools, as our guide told us quite candidly, it to produce good Settlers. This means more than at first appears. It means both developing the qualities that go to make a successful Settler, and also confirming the children in their wish to go back to Settlement life at all. One of the great problems for the Settlements is how to prevent the new generation, who may lack some of the pioneering zeal of their parents, from drifting away to the greater opportunities and amenities of the towns.

Life on one of these Settlements, even when there is no war in the country, is hard and relentless, a life literally hacked out of a rocky soil. What makes the Settler, of course, is his socialist (may one say communist?) idealism reinforced by Zionism. He has voluntarily accepted a life of hard manual labour (the cobbler in one of the Settlements I visited had given up a university job in Canada), because that is the condition of joining a community that moulds its own life more completely than we can easily imagine. The very walls of the living-hut, the simple furniture inside, are the direct product of the Settlers' own efforts. Not only is it all theirs, but they made it: most of their food and shelter, the clothes they wear, their education and their cultural activities. Obviously if this life is to survive, let alone be developed, the next generation must understand it intimately, and also must have the qualities and skills that are needed to run a Settlement. The children must wish to return after attending secondary school; and they must bring with them a wide range of competences, and above all determination, resilience, complete unselfishness, and faith in the undertaking. It is this kind of child that the school at Mishmar Haemek wished to produce. I am not sure that Mr. Bantock would necessarily approve of such an objective, but I am sure he would agree that in this case the child was not the end of the system and

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that the staff wished to foster as far as they could a particular attitude towards life and a particular kind of individual. We received the firm impression that the Hatzair Hashomir Settlement movement looked to education as its means of survival and advance.

What kind of education did we find at Mishmar Haemak? In what sense, if at all, was a point of view imposed on the children? To what extent were Freedom and Spontaneity encouraged? Viewed from a certain point of view, the answer is that Mishmar Haemek strikes the ordinary visitor from this country as decidedly 'unorthodox'. Our first impression of the children being in possession was not inaccurate. The school and its scheme of life seemed unquestionably to revolve around the children, rather than the children to fit into an already determined structure (this, as I will suggest, was in fact an appearance rather than a reality). Indeed, whether it was lying about the grounds, or sitting in their bed-sitting rooms (two boys and two girls share a room, remaining together throughout their period in the school), running the meals from the cooking to the serving and washing-up, or finally when they began work again later in the day in their classrooms or on the farm or in the workshops—in all this we had a sense of the children in control, at any rate *at* the controls.

A group of children entering the school together make up a form, which will remain together throughout. This form does the bulk of its work *as a group* and on the project system. The project themes had a distinctly Zionist flavour about them: the Diaspora; Feudalism; Fruit-growing; the Sources and Uses of Power; the Arab in Palestine; the Growth of Socialism; Soil Erosion; and so on. Some two or three contrasting themes are taken at a time, so that the different branches of academic knowledge are studied concurrently. The group works as a team, in the sense that it distributes the work among itself and moves at the pace of its slowest member. The theme is discussed at regular intervals with the member of the staff in charge; and he (or she) also punctuates the project work with normal classroom teaching on very informal lines when the project demands it (some subjects, like languages, which do not enter into the project scheme, are also taught in the ordinary way). Finally each group compiles its project report, written and illustrated and then bound into a book.

This system has obvious enough consequences. The children develop little if any desire for *self*-advancement, they think of the *group's* advantages and success and they accept as natural a scheme of mutual assistance. Further, their learning is prompted and disciplined by their study of concrete situations and problems, with the result that it seldom seems academic, not an end pursued for its own sake but as a means to solid everyday achievement. The children become reliable, through this kind of work, and resourceful; they come to feel that their personal security and betterment are the direct outcome of the group making the most of its collective capacities and ingenuity (as an example of this we saw, in the evening, two brighter children in one group giving some private

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coaching to another child, in order to help it on and so not hold the whole group back too much). Complementary to this project work, is a system of what one might call inverted fagging: an elder child is attached to a small group of younger ones, to act as an advisor on almost all aspects of their lives. This appeared to work quite easily and without patronage or excessive prying. It was such a relationship that we had witnessed where the small children and the elder girl were in charge of the dining-hall.

Our visit to Mishmar Haemek was very brief and inadequate. But from what we saw, we were not surprised to learn that the scheme was successful in that the great majority of the children went back to the Settlements and that it was as fully-fledged Settlers themselves, in their skills and outlook, that they returned. They returned partly for patriotic reasons, and partly because it was the life they knew: but also because this was the only life through which they could retain the *human* pattern in which they had come to believe. Their school life had given them certain satisfactions that they were determined to cling to, whatever the material difficulties. For us, at the time, it was an invigorating experience not only to find a school animated by social values of this kind (limited though they may be in some ways), but also to see a scheme of education so meticulously designed to fulfil certain defined purposes. At Mishmar Haemek there was a calculated, but not a crude, attempt to foster certain very excellent human qualities and discourage others, and apparently it succeeded.

The instances I have been describing (and I have purposely been describing instances rather than elaborating theories) suggest a number of radical criticisms of the thesis advanced by Mr. Bantock. To begin with, it seems clear that free methods and experiment are not necessarily an indication of purposelessness. For the most part they involve too much thought and a more qualified staff than are to be found in the great majority of schools, where a lack of any but utilitarian purposes leads to a stolid retention of the old methods rather than a trying out of the new. Where there is what Mr. Bantock calls 'basic uncertainty', there will also be an atmosphere of stale and safe routine, of the bread-and-butter job drably done. This can be put round the other way, by saying that a clearly defined purpose may well find that its most appropriate means are the schemes of teaching that Mr. Bantock sums up as a faith in Freedom and Spontaneity. In my experience Mishmar Haemek is not an isolated instance, but simply an unusually clear illustration. Indeed, if one may be personal here, most of my brief teaching experience has been of an experimental kind, mostly with methods of informal group discussion and group projects; but I don't believe that this has been merely 'an unconscious attempt to cover insufficiency by surface agitation': we have had clear purposes in mind and have not been particularly unconcerned about standards.

What becomes clear, as one thinks over Mr. Bantock's arguments and then looks at the kind of teaching I have tried to

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describe, is that terms like Freedom and Spontaneity need very careful definition (as indeed he says, in a general kind of way; but to state the need is not the same thing as to provide the definition). What I have in mind is that there was a great deal of Freedom at Mishmar Haemek, and there was almost nothing but Spontaneity in the Shakespeare project, *but only within certain bounds and in certain directions*. At the school, the staff had worked out the pattern of education and the scheme of projects, and the children were only Free within this arbitrary framework. In the Shakespeare project, the Spontaneity was delimited by the nature of the task and, indeed, by the text of the play itself. Arithmetic taught by the freest of play-methods still ought to be a logical discipline. The very fact that a teacher decides to adopt a Free method rather than some other implies a limitation of the child's freedom and spontaneity, so that the matter can only be pursued further (and ought only to be criticized) when one has defined the framework within which the freedom and spontaneity operate. Similarly, when Mr. Bantock talks of 'imposing' a point of view, what does he intend? There is a valid sense in which a precise and perhaps even a limited point of view was imposed at Mishmar Haemek. But imposition of this kind—and to an extent all education is an imposition—can take very different forms; and though Mr. Bantock assures us that he is not a bottom-beater, neither, it seems, is he an exponent of the less obtrusive methods of imposing one's point of view. Indeed, he seems singularly uninterested in *method* altogether. But that is hardly surprising since he regards the 'current emphasis on method' as another way of concealing one's 'basic uncertainty'—Mr. Bantock's students must be developing a good deal of basic uncertainty about his own function in a training-college.

In short, a conscientious teacher concerns himself endlessly about his teaching-methods, not in order to avoid encouraging a point of view but so that his encouragement shall not be dogmatic or authoritarian. To a great extent this means devizing the appropriate environment so that the children will live one kind of life rather than another, absorb a certain quality of impression rather than another; it is as if the children find themselves on a particular stage-set so that the play they invent and produce will be quite spontaneously of a particular kind also. It isn't that the teacher sits back, absolved of responsibility or a concern for ends, but that often he must *seem* to be sitting back and leaving the children to their own devices. This capacity for reticence is one of the hardest lessons a teacher has to learn; and it explains, if any explanation is needed, why cultural self-righteousness is no grounds for assuming the mantle of educational wisdom.

BORIS FORD.

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GOETHE'S 'ROMAN ELEGIES'

> ' . . . I acknowledge with reverence that which life has taught you to call "Goethe", the largeness and light which for you, begin with this name . . . '
>
> (Rilke's *Letters*, August 2nd, 1904).

IN September of 1786 Goethe crept quietly—surreptitiously even—away from his Weimar friends, and escaped to Italy, the country of his desire The two years he spent travelling there were probably a turning-point in his creative life: he made a final renunciation of the youthful enthusiasms and cynicisms of *Sturm und Drang*—a process which had begun long before—and he finally dedicated himself to a life of hard work in art. Whether or not he was aware of making these irrevocable decisions, it is clear that on returning to Weimar society he experienced a feeling of estrangement from his old friends—those 'lovely ladies, and gentlemen of the politer world',[1] perhaps. The most striking instance of this estrangement was the abrupt, perhaps cruel, conclusion of his long and troubling 'Platonic' friendship with the Frau von Stein, wife of the Master of the Horse; such an association was no doubt eminently suitable for the 'promising young poet', both *genialisch* and socially brilliant in a brilliant circle, but for the self-conscious. dedicated and clearheaded artist (clearheaded, at least, in his striving and desire to be clearheaded) something simpler, less artificial and less nervous, was perhaps required.

And Goethe found this, a month after his return to Weimar, in his sudden love for Christiane Vulpius, an uneducated 'daughter of the people'—actually the daughter of a minor official. I have no wish to participate in the once-popular dispute over Christiane's suitability for the high post of lover to Germany's greatest poet; but I suggest that the cultured bridling of a past President of the English Goethe Society, for instance—'one stands aghast at the illiterateness of Christiane's letters'—indicates a radically false approach, both to the question of Goethe's personal life (for he himself had nothing but gratitude and affection for Christiane[2])

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[1]The beginning of the *Second Elegy*.

[2]When she died in 1816 he wrote:

> Der ganze Gewinn meines Lebens
> Ist, ihren Verlust zu beweinen—
>
> 'The whole profit of my life
> Is to lament her loss'. (*Den 6ten. Juni, 1816*).

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and to the question of Goethe's work—which is as far as it could be from showing any sign of corruption by an illiterate succubus.

The setting of the *Roman Elegies*—there are twenty of them, all written during 1788-9 after his return from Italy—is Rome; the theme, with a certain important qualification, is the poet's fully requited love for a Roman girl. Thus Goethe's recent sojourn in Rome and his Weimar 'liaison'—it was, incidentally, the liaison of a lifetime—are merged in a poetry which avoids both the danger inherent in the love lyric's narrow and highly-personal range and the risk of artificial 'classicizing', of appearing in the comic guise of a late eighteenth-century *hochgelehrter Herr* Propertius.

In the *Roman Elegies* we see Goethe at his most civilized, his most gracefully urbane; we see him exercising that higher kind of sophistication—that sound first-hand knowledge of human ends and human means—which is implicit in Faust's final speeches in the *Second Part*:

> Der Erdenkreis ist mir genug bekannt.
> Nach drüben ist die Aussicht uns verannt;
> Thor, wer dorthin die Augen blinzend richtet,
> Sich über Wolken seines Gleichen dichtet!
> Er stehe fest und sehe hier sich um;
> Dem Tüchtigen ist diese Welt nicht stumm.
> Was braucht er in die Ewigkeit zu schweifen!
> Was er erkennt, lässt sich ergreifen.
> Er wandle so den Erdentag entlang;
> Wenn Geister spuken, geh' er seinen Gang:
> Im Weiterschreiten find' er Qual and Glück,
> Er, unbefriedigt jeden Augenblick!
>
> (I realize that earth's sphere is sufficient. The vision upwards is barred to us; fool, who turns his dazzled eyes that way, poetizing about his equals above the clouds! Let him stand firm and look around him here; this world is not dumb to the man of ability. What need has he to soar into the infinite! What he perceives let him comprehend, thus passing through his mortal days. When phantoms haunt him, let him go his way: finding in onward-striding both happiness and pain, he, uncontented every moment!)

This is what Goethe had written in his diary in 1779, looking back on the first thirty years of his life:

> 'God help me further, and give me light, that I may not so much stand in my own way, but see to do from morning till evening the work that lies before me, and obtain a clear conception of the order of things; that I may not be as those are who spend the day in complaining of headache, and the night in drinking the wine which gives the headache'.

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The hero of the *Roman Elegies* is certainly not one of that latter species: he is deeply in love but not painfully enamoured; his relationship is illicit but not shameful; his mistress is unlettered but not illiterate; he is in full control of his senses—and he intends to make full use of them. You will find nothing of Shelley's idealizing love in the *Elegies*, and nothing of what is called Byronic passion, though there are humorous passages (as in the *Fifteenth* and *Sixteenth Elegies*) which would not be out of place in *Don Juan*. And there is a whole world of difference between the disappointed love of Werther and the well-appointed love of the poet of the *Elegies*—a whole education in self-knowledge has intervened. An extract from the deliberately 'Educational Novel', *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, written soon after the *Elegies*, suggests by its desideration one of the lines along which that education has proceeded:

> 'There are few who at once have Thought and the capacity of Action. Thought expands, but lames; Action animates, but narrows'.

The tone of the *Elegies* has been described—disapprovingly—as 'unveiled', which I take to imply that the poems are vehicles for unbridled passions of the erotic kind; but such a description can be no more than a puritanical reaction to such isolated lines as

> Und belehr' ich mich nicht, indem ich des lieblichen Busens
> Formen spähe, die Hand leite die Hüfte hinab?
>
> (And am I not teaching myself, as I regard the shapes
> Of those beloved breasts, slide my hands over the hips?)

Refer to the context of these lines (the *Fifth Elegy*) and you will find that the poem continues in a rather different strain. Goethe's interest—for Goethe clearly regards himself as the hero of the *Elegies*[3]—is not focussed fervidly on the physical attributes of his mistress; after a brief but vivid consideration of these he takes us momentarily into the cooler world of classical sculpture. Here, in translation, is the complete poem:

> With joy I now find myself on classical soil, inspired:
> Present and Past both speak to me, with louder and more stirring voice.
> Here I follow advice, skip through the works of the ancients
> With a busy spirit, and daily with new pleasure.

---

[3]And is able to do so without risking the quality of his poetry—simply because of that cool, quasi-impersonal, examination of his feelings which, together with his reluctance ever to 'lose' himself in emotion, accounts both for the bewilderment of the women with whom he was apparently in love and for the shocked and disappointed tone in which biographers speak of this aspect of his behaviour.

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Amor, however, keeps me busy through the nights, with other things:
If I grow even half as learned there, then I'll be doubly blest.
And am I not teaching myself, as I regard the shapes
Of those beloved breasts, slide my hands over the hips?
Only then do I truly understand the marble: I consider and compare,
See with feeling eyes, feel with seeing hands.
And thus, if the beloved robs me of some hours of day,
She gives me back those hours at night, as compensation.
Not only kisses pass between us, but thoughtful words as well;
And when at last she falls asleep I lie and meditate.
Often I have made my poems, even, in her arms, and
With my finger measured the hexameter's rhythm
Softly on her back. She breathes in delicious slumber,
Her breath burns through to the very depths of my being.
Amor meanwhile trims the lamp, remembering the times
That he has done his triumvirs this self-same service.

This, or something comparable, happens again and again: the poet moves gracefully between life and art, between the intimately personal and the impersonally historical, between the sharp exclamation of joy and the thoughtful soliloquy of a cultured citizen of the world.

For Goethe's amour is conducted against an immediately convincing background of classical evocation and reminiscence—'the works of the ancients', significant mythological allusions, and the topography, history and customs of Rome. Indeed, the love element, though expressed in such direct and striking tones, has been sunk well into what we might call the *body* of the poems, and there is perhaps more of the spirit of Rome—Goethe's Rome—in them than of the spirit of Amor:

O, wie fühl' ich in Rom mich so froh! gedenk' ich der Zeiten,
Da mich ein graulicher Tag hinten im Norden umfing,
Trübe der Himmel und schwer auf meine Scheitel sich senkte,
Farb- und gestaltlos die Welt um den Ermatteten lag
Und ich über mein Ich, des unbefriedigten Geistes
Düstre Wege zu spähn, still in Betrachtung versank.
Nun umleuchtet der Glanz des helleren Aethers die Stirne;
Phöbus rufet, der Gott, Formen und Farben hervor,
Sternhell glänzet die Nacht, sie klingt von weichen Gesängen,
Und mir leuchtet der Mond heller als nordischer Tag.

(Ah, how very happy I feel in Rome! Remembering the time
Grey days enveloped me, back in the North:
The heavens, dreary and heavy, weighed on my shoulders,
Void of colour and form the world lay round me in my lassitude,
And I, in silence, brooding over my ego, exploring
The mournful paths of the discontented spirit.

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But now an air brighter and more luminous glows round my brow:
Phoebus, the god, evokes both colours and forms.
Star-bright shines the night, rings out in tender songs,
And to me this moon burns brighter than the northern sun.

—*Seventh Elegy*).

Occasionally the tone is what one might perhaps call 'un-veiled' —in sudden flashes of frank passion—but no adjective is less appropriate than this to the tone of the work as a whole: for this is the conscious and careful product of a mind whose subtlety is rarely recognized in these days. Critics and readers to-day will readily admit Goethe's proficiency in the simple lyric (like *Wandrers Nachtlied* and the Mignon songs) and just as readily they will grant him a large allowance of profundity—to anyone with no more than a hearsay knowledge of the *Second Part* of *Faust* this work may even seem the zenith, or nadir, of Germanic profundity. But what few English readers realize is that Goethe excelled in a remarkably poised *middle style*. And the *Roman Elegies* are the highest example of Goethe's work in the kind of writing where an easy lyricism blends smoothly with a rather weightier, allusive and even sententious style.

Not that the latter element overshadows the former—the *Elegies* are far from being philosophical poems. Yet they are certainly poems informed by an attitude towards life which is so definite and so much the product of living and thinking that one feels the temptation to call them 'philosophical'. To define that attitude, however, is not easy: one might circle around it by speaking of 'civilized paganism', 'intelligent hedonism', 'controlled sensuousness' —but such terms make no mention of the elements of direct passion, amused tenderness, unembittered scepticism and deep respect for the achievement of the past and for obsolete beliefs which are all present and active in the *Elegies*. More than any other work of Goethe's comparable in size, this sequence of poems is coloured by the guiding principle of Goethe's later years—that a human life should be a judicious union of action and meditation. He knew that for men of his kind the danger was that the latter should smother the former:

'Wie kann man sich selbst kennen lernen? Durch Betrachten niemals, wohl aber durch Handeln. Versuche deine Pflicht zu tun, und du weisst gleich, was an dir ist'.

('How can one get to know oneself? Certainly not through meditation, but through action. Try to do your duty, and you will soon find out what is in you').

The word 'duty' is obviously not used in any narrow moral sense here; Goethe, in this series of maxims, hastens to define the word, though still in no very precise fashion:

Was aber ist deine Pflicht? Die Forderung des Tages.

(But what is your duty?—What the day demands).

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Only the literal moralist would maintain that the day demanded evil if it demanded that Goethe should live so long with Christiane unmarried, or that the hero of the *Elegies* should indulge in a liaison with his Faustina—for the *Roman Elegies* are free from all taint of sexual unpleasantness of any kind, and the liaison they imply contains within it the germ of a steadfast married respectability equal to Goethe's own.

And, since one can hardly imagine Propertius happily married to his Cynthia, to say that is to indicate the essential difference between the elegies of the German poet and those of the Roman poet whose work naturally comes to mind in this connection. The two sets of poems admittedly have much in common: the celebration of a not quite licit love, the scandalmongering of neighbours, a strong sense of locality, the copious use of mythological parallels to illustrate the poet's love (and especially the personification and frequent invocation of Amor). But these are merely similarities in the outward garb of elegy; the total meaning of Goethe's poems is radically opposed to that of Propertius' work—as opposed as are, in character, Faustina and Cynthia, for though the former may fear the prying eyes of neighbours and the betraying bark of a dog, she indulges in none of the latter's 'nights of shame'; Cynthia reminds us of Goethe's forthright comment in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*:

> 'What a miserable creature is the woman who, inspiring desire, does not also inspire reverence and love.

But the significance, for the German poet, of Faustina-Christiane is seen in the glad vivacious rhythms of the short *Ninth Elegy* and its heightened awareness and enjoyment and even transfiguration of common external things—a complete contrast to the Propertian 'hangover':

Herbstlich leuchtet die Flamme vom ländlich geselligen Herde,
Knistert und glänzet, wie rasch! sausend vom Reisig empor.
Diesen Abend erfreut sie mich mehr; denn eh noch zur Kohle
Sich das Bündel verzehrt, unter die Asche sich neigt,
Kommt mein liebes Mädchen. Dann flammen Reisig und Scheite,
Und die erwärmete Nacht wird uns ein glänzendes Fest.
Morgen frühe geschäftig verlässt sie das Lager der Liebe,
Weckt aus der Asche behend Flammen aufs neue hervor.
Denn vor andern verlieh der Schmeichlerin Amor die Gabe,
Freude zu wecken, die kaum still wie zu Asche versank.

(In Autumn the flames from my friendly country hearth glow,
crackle, and blaze—
How high they shoot, how briskly, out of the burning brushwood!
This evening they please me especially: before the bundle
Burns away to charcoal, before it falls to ash,
My darling girl will come. Then brushwood and logs will flame away,

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And the night, made warm, become a glittering gala for us.
Early tomorrow she'll leave the bed of love, adroitly
Rousing fresh flames out of the ashes. For
Above all, Amor has given my flatterer the gift
To awaken joy that lay still, as if fallen to ash).

Propertius' Amor is a power to be feared, a power that brings degradation, humiliation and despair along with its uncertain pleasures, while Goethe's Amor, though the poet pays tribute to its ferocity in the *Nineteenth Elegy*, is 'Amor der Schalk', the rogue who calls for tactful handling and careful watching but is, nonetheless, a great power for good. In fact Amor is the power who, among other benefits, translates ancient Rome into terms that the modern poet can immediately comprehend. For Goethe has every intention of profiting by his love, whereas Propertius in his calmer moments can do little but lament his condition:

Non sum ego qui fueram.

Propertius seeks excitement in his love ('in te pax mihi nulla placet'), and he is all the more infatuated with his mistress for her wildness, cruelty and profligacy. Goethe, however, has other things with which to occupy his life, mysteries other than those of a woman's heart to explore, and so he prefers a peaceful and reliable relationship:

Reizendes Hinderniss will die rasche Jugend; ich liebe,
Mich des versicherten Guts lange bequem zu erfreun

(Headstrong youth desires the tempting obstacle, but I prefer
Long and easy enjoyment of a fortune that's assured).

Love is Propertius' whole life: we see how ill at ease he grows when, in some of the poems, he attempts to don the heavy armour of the epic poet and celebrate Rome's military prowess. His ironical self-criticism—'nos, ut consuemus, nostros agitamus amores'—is apt, but it does not help him to throw off the bonds of his passion; only disgust can do that. For Goethe, on the other hand, passion is not an end in itself but, rather, a means to live more energetically, more comprehensively, more *passionately*. We see that love, in the *Fifth Elegy*, is a key to the understanding of antique art—'Only then do I truly understand the marble'—and a key, ultimately, to the better understanding of the human spirit and to the fuller enjoyment of everyday life.

Thus, in the end, Propertius must confess that his only chance is to make an utter break with this destructive passion, and to dedicate himself to *Mens Bona*, 'if such a goddess there be'. This, however, is the deity to whom Goethe's *Roman Elegies* might well have been inscribed; plainly it is Good Sense who has protected the German poet from the malignant Amor whose tyranny drove Propertius to pray that he might be borne 'through distant countries, through distant seas, where no woman may ever trace my path'.

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The hero of the Cynthia elegies, one who like Werther

> drank misanthropy from the abundance of love,[4]

emerges as the victim of Amor; the hero of the *Roman Elegies* as the victor of Amor.

A further impression we receive from a comparison of the two sets of elegies is that the German poet is merely a 'distinguished visitor' to the verse-form, while for the Roman poet it is his native land, his only home: 'at tu finge elegos, fallax opus:—haec tua castra! . . . ' Goethe's debt to Propertius, if any debt there be, is trifling, and Scherer would seem to make a sound critical point when he says, with regard to the *Eleventh Elegy*:

> 'in four distichs Goethe portrays and characterizes seven gods and goddesses, so clearly and yet with such simple words that it is evident that his art was formed more under the influence of Homer than of Propertius'.

For Goethe brings with him all the experience of a considerable *dramatist* and the gift of swiftly setting a scene and economically creating a character. The poet is by no means the sole actor in his poems: we have memorable characterizations of Faustina and her uncle and, among many other specious deities, Amor and Jupiter and Fame. The point I wish to make—since it seems to me one way of describing the continuous vitality of the *Elegies*—is that the situations between these various characters are often closer to *drama* than to mere descriptive tableau. The *Eleventh Elegy* (which Scherer describes above) is perhaps no more than a finely-executed classical bas-relief, but the *Nineteenth*, for example, contains a wholly successful little Olympian farce—with its clearly differentiated and conflicting characters, the boastful Goddess of Fame, her hero the all-too-human Hercules, the versatile Venus and her unlucky husband Vulcan 'der Alte', and the practical joker Amor, a farce, moreover, which is used to point quite a serious moral.

And so, throughout the *Roman Elegies*, a lyrical *monologue intérieur* and what with little exaggeration we may call a dramatic *dialogue* are blended together to make what seems to me one of Goethe's finest works and a work unique in modern European literature. As a fitting conclusion, here is an extract from a 'speech' of Amor; *also sprach der Sophist*:

> '. . . Nun du mir lässiger dienst, wo sind die schönen Gestalten,
> Wo die Farben, der Glanz deiner Erfindungen hin?
> Denkst du nun wieder zu bilden, o Freund? Die Schule der Griechen
> Blieb noch offen, das Thor schlossen die Jahre nicht zu.
> Ich, der Lehrer, bin ewig jung und liebe die Jungen.
> Altklug lieb' ich dich nicht! Munter! Begreife mich wohl!
> War das Antike doch neu, da jene Glücklichen lebten!

[4] *Harzreise im Winter.*

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Lebe glücklich, und so lebe die Vorzeit in dir!
Stoff zum Liede, wo nimmt du ihn her? Ich muss dir ihn geben,
Und den höheren Stil lehret die Liebe dich nur'.

(' . . . Now that you serve me so sluggishly, where are the lovely forms,
Where the colours, where the brilliance of your invention?
Do you think of creating again, my friend? The school of the Greeks
Is still open, the years have not closed its doors.
I, the teacher, am eternally young, and youth I love.
Precocity I can't abide! Be gay! Then understand me well.
It was modern, the antique, when these happy ones were living!
Live happily, and then the Past will live in you!
Material for song, where will you find it? I must provide it,
And Love alone can coach you in the finer style'.

—*Thirteenth Elegy*).

D. J. ENRIGHT.

NOTES FROM AMERICA (I):

MENCKEN AND THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE[1]

THE recent publication in America of Mencken's *The American Language* has been accompanied in the reviews and journals by the customary grateful acknowledgments any work of comparable size and arduousness that has already won conventional acceptance is sure to elicit. There is one kind of evaluation (in which the stress would be placed on the documentary value of the work—and here *The American Language* fully merits its status as a modern classic—and on the good offices of its humour in sustaining that enormous burden) that would justify a good deal of praise. But after reading a handful of such reviews one grows impatient at the absence of any other kind. Since there seems to be a general, if not very detailed, idea in America of Mencken's limitations, at least as a critic of literature, one is inclined to attribute the absence

[1] *The American Language*, Fourth Edition, 1936, by H. L. Mencken (Alfred A. Knopf, $6.00).
Supplement One: *The American Language*, 1945, by H. L. Mencken (Alfred A. Knopf, $6.00).
Supplement Two: *The American Language*, 1948, by H. L. Mencken (Alfred A. Knopf, $7.50).

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of a closer view to the faint but pleasant nostalgia for a remote national era that Mencken's name somehow evokes. Perhaps these critics consider the question closed, and now take Mencken for the pleasure one can have in reading him. And there is something in that. But returning to these reviews, one notes that they are, after all, accepting Mencken's attitude to American English at its face value; and that, if his limitations as a critic of poetry have vaguely been remarked on in the past, no one has so far thought it worthwhile to examine the possibility of these limitations having entered into the philological work. Some years ago Mencken estimated that perhaps a million words of criticism had been written about him. The small amount of this that has come under my own observation deals with questions that, to me at least, seem more or less gratuitous. As far as I know no one has examined with much interest the assumptions about language and literature that are implicit in Mencken's writings. I am not, certainly, referring to the most obvious assumption in Mencken's major work: that the American language has a life of its own and ought to live it. That Mencken was able to suggest this question was still undecided as late as the publication of the First Edition of *The American Language* in 1919 is a substantial tribute to his control of dramatic effect. But there are other and somewhat less obvious assumptions present in that book (Mencken had, in fact, treated the validity of American English more as a thesis to be proved than as an assumption on which he wrote); but before analysing these assumptions it will be convenient to make an excursion into Mencken's notions on art as they appear scattered through his other writings produced through the 'twenties and earlier. If much of what will be said here seems too accessible to require extended comment, the fact remains that the transparent shallowness in Mencken's æsthetic writings controls the direction of movement in *The American Language*, which, as the recent reviews indicate, is far from sharing an equal degree of transparency.

I.

I do not know if Edmund Wilson still holds the same opinion, but writing in *The New Republic* in 1921 he said: ' . . . Mencken is the civilized consciousness of modern America, its learning, its intelligence and its taste, realizing the grossness of its manners and mind, and crying out in horror and chagrin'. To call a writer the 'civilized consciousness' of a nation is, if not the highest, then nearly the highest, praise he can merit; and as all major decorations presumably carry a meaning over and above mere honorary effulgence, so, I presume, does this one. For example, 'civilized consciousness' seems to imply a serious concern for standards, however defined, and a belief that they can operate effectively in at least some portion of society. This much is suggested by the barest etymology of the word 'civilized', which carries a public rather than a private significance, and points towards a classical acceptance of an ordered society rather than towards a romantic

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rejection. It suggests some system of appropriate subordinations, but its insistence would be on the organic unity of society rather than on its lines of internal division. I don't think this is forcing a meaning on the phrase, for if it does not mean this much then it is very loosely used. In applying this term to Mencken it is not important that Wilson may have over-estimated his subject's stature, but he seems to have miscalculated what the nature of Mencken's intentions has been all along. For Mencken has little faith in or affection for a civilized society in the sense in which that term is used here. He sometimes speaks of the necessity of a cultivated audience, or the desirability of being civilized (as in his essay on Huneker), but these formulations operate at a superficial level. One thinks of his long essay, 'The National Letters'—the earliest modern attack on the Best-Seller I know of (and it is a good one)—and one hesitates. Undoubtedly Wilson had his reasons. But in the end such things as this are not enough and one is compelled to concur in Eliot's severity: the criticism of Mencken is merely destructive and facile. His recognitions are important in their way, and it is greatly to Mencken's credit to have made them; but they are useless unless followed up by practical judgments that can be depended on, or at least by some idea of the elements that would enter into a satisfactory practical judgment on the arts. But Mencken's conception of the function of art in society is wholly inadequate. However, these charges require substantiation, and I wish to show, as briefly as possible, that Mencken believes (1) an artist has no relationship with society other than withdrawal; (2) that his indiscriminate attacks on the word *moral* have destroyed the basis for any other kind of relationship; and that (3) these facts have coloured disastrously his judgments on literature, and hence on words themselves.

(1) To begin (with reference to Wilson's remark) on a stale but still pertinent note: there is no 'horror' and no 'chagrin' present in any of Mencken's indictments of America—at least no chagrin of the kind that moves towards corrective action. (Naturally I do not mean corrective action in the sense that Mencken rightly deplores—corrective action based complacently on some official platform—but rather that urgency to correct and modify that is the inevitable consequence of relevant responses to an unsatisfactory cultural situation). One even dares speak of responsibilities, but Mencken has rejected them repeatedly in some of his most vigorous language: 'What concerns me alone is myself, and the interest of a few close friends. For all I care, the rest of the world may go to hell at to-day's sunset'. If the dour institutions that perhaps pass off as a little too representative of America were to disappear, so far from considering this a victory Mencken would probably regret it since he has defined his literary personality largely through his hostility to them—and it is a kind of hostility that supports while it attacks. This is not a new observation, but it is conspicuously at variance with any idea of an artist's role as a 'civilized consciousness'; and if it seems vaguely unattached as stated here, it

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can be more easily focused on the particular when *The American Language* is considered.

It was certainly not shocking—at least not in the way intended—when Mencken wrote of the first war: 'On that day during the world war when the most critical battle was being fought, I sat in my still, sunlit, cozy library composing a chapter on æsthetics for a new book on the drama. And at five o'clock, my day's work done, I shook and drank half-a-dozen excellent apéritifs'. One need not dispute Mencken's view of the war to be disturbed by the tone of this passage (although it is damaged by being removed from its context). One is reminded of Ronald Firbank's boast that he would spend those same years eating breast of chicken and drinking champagne in the most expensive hotels. Apparently there is a point at which the values of the admirer of the *bête blonde* (Mencken's admiration for Nietzsche is always significant) and the æsthete intersect, and that point may be called moral indifference. It is not that one thinks a better occupation than serious criticism could have been found easily in those years; but starting from such indifference, and on the basis of such an exclusion, who could have trusted the criticism produced? (I'm aware that, in introducing this problem of the relation between the artist and society here in this particular way I may have left myself open to misinterpretation, but it is necessary to go on and trust that any ambiguity at this point will be cleared away later). The question grows insistent: to what extent is Mencken, for all his aura of Baltimore and *The American Mercury*, an 'Art for art's sake' disciple? At its best his style sounds like Twain's, but how near are his intentions to Pater's? The final answer will lie in Mencken's dealings with the word *moral* (to be considered shortly), and by the evidence offered in his theorizings and practical judgments on poetry. But something still remains to be said of the social position and attitudes of the civilized man (and artist) as Mencken sees him.

For the sake of brevity it will be convenient here to compress two terms into one, 'aristocrat' and 'creative artist', which Mencken usually employs separately. It will do Mencken no injustice since there is, indeed, a rather ominous tendency to separate practical action (he usually envisages the aristocrat in his specifically political function) and original thought. Still, Mencken's hypothetical aristocrat does represent everything positive that Mencken feels about the political world, and imperceptibly his figure merges into that of the creative artist. In describing this aristocracy Mencken sometimes seems to advance the theory of an élite upper class who are the dispensers of values: at least that is the impression one gets from such a superficially fine formulation of the disease of American life as 'the lack of a civilized aristocracy, secure in its position, animated by intelligent curiosity, skeptical of all facile generalizations, superior to the sentimentality of the mob, and delighting in the battle of ideas for its own sake'. But even here there are certain shades of tone that aren't quite right—for example, the rather vulgar contrast of 'superiority' with 'mob', itself

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implicitly a facile generalization that turns its back too readily on the enormously complex questions involved in that juxtaposition; and the glib assumption that a battle of ideas for its own sake (a deeply American assumption), unrelated to practical considerations of value, is anything but a deadening exercise. But on the whole, it will be said, the formulation reads well. However, the last test of such an aristocracy as an effective civilizing agency would be in the kind of sensitivity with which Mencken would wish it to be endowed, and in what locality of interest he would encourage its sensibility to strike its most characteristic note. Beginning with the last question, one may quote a typical passage from Mencken describing what, one must suppose, would be the deepest belief that he would bequeath to these aristocrats—the conviction that 'human life is a seeking without a finding, that its purpose is impenetrable, that joy and sorrow are alike meaningless'. This 'you will see writ largely in the work of most great creative artists. It is obviously the final message, if any message is genuinely to be found there, of the nine symphonies of Beethoven . . . Mark Twain was haunted by it, as Nietzsche was by the idea of eternal recurrence . . . In Shakespeare . . . it amounts to a veritable obsession. And what else is there in Balzac, Goethe, Swift, Molière, Turgenev, Ibsen, Dostoyevsky, Romain Rolland, Anatole France?' The quotation continues to queue up Zola, Hauptmann, Hardy, Sudermann, Synge, Gorky, Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, Dreiser, and George Moore. This conception of art, which deploys the artists against eternity (personified, of course, in the implied Inscrutability), a conception that favours such phrases as: 'the unfathomable game', 'the elemental forces', 'the profound meaninglessness of life', 'the blind groping that we call aspiration', etc.—clearly this conception is as quasi-mystical as anything one could find. The above phrases are all quoted from an essay on Conrad in which Mencken attacks mysticism in literature, or for that matter, anywhere else—but in the face of the evidence the least one can say is that Mencken seems to be suffering from the self-imposed deprivation and doing his best to get around it. If the passage quoted makes anything clear it is that the locality of principal interest for the desiderated aristocrats is not a civilized society but the hinterland of the Unfathomable. This is merely an evasion of the most immediate and pressing problems of a culture, and the easiest way to escape the necessity of maintaining any standards at all. If one insists on retaining some shreds of the critical faculty, the nine symphonies of Beethoven are played, and one watches while the figures of Shakespeare and Frank Norris merge into one—a beautiful demonstration of what Mencken has called the fascination of 'the immense indifference of things'.

(2) Granting that this class, as conceived by Mencken, actually *were* interested in maintaining any standards in that society on which they seem to be constantly turning their backs to contemplate the profound meaninglessness of life, that vigilance would have to be exercised in a moral air capable of supporting a sense of mutual

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obligations. But Mencken's eagerness to escape into a realm of 'pure æsthetic judgment', free of the responsibilities and disciplines to which any less exalted artistic attitude would leave him exposed, has led him to simplify recklessly or to exclude entirely any real meaning from the word *moral*. Mencken uses it constantly in his criticism as a synonym for *puritan*, or sometimes for *ethical* (in order, perhaps, to discolour it with Y.M.C.A. associations). Consequently he destroys it for critical purposes altogether. Here are two representative examples of his usage:

> 'The American, try as he will, can never imagine any work of the imagination as wholly devoid of moral content'.
>
> 'A novel or a play is judged among us, not by its dignity of conception, its artistic honesty, its perfection of workmanship, but almost entirely by its orthodoxy of doctrine, its platitudinousness, its usefulness as a moral tract'.

These remarks have in view a particular and obnoxious situation that exists in America, and is not unknown in England ('Fully nine-tenths of the reviews of Dreiser's *The Titan* . . . were devoted chiefly to indignant denunciations of the morals of Frank Cowperwood . . . '), but when that situation is cleared away and Mencken is faced with the essential evaluation of a book, *moral* no longer exists for him except in a pejorative sense. He is forced to fall back on such substitutes as 'dignity of conception' and 'artistic honesty', and they aren't helpful since what meaning they may have had was itself dependent on at least some kind of significance attaching itself to the rejected term. In his hostility to the American scene Mencken has forgotten that a moral and a puritan judgment are not necessarily the same, and that the former is not essentially related to any specific body of doctrine at all; that it is, as it relates to a work of art, a concern for discovering and maintaining by incessant vigilance, the finest possible adjustments among the individual, the work of art, and the artist. It is the recognition that the greatest good of one of these terms must necessarily be the greatest good of all three. Such a moral concern will imply further that the term *individual* unfolds at once into the larger social term; but it will not vulgarly reduce society to an abstraction into which only the most 'pushing' critical distinctions and judgments may penetrate. Unfortunately, the 'pure æsthetic judgment' has no more use for *moral* in this sense than in any other. Perhaps it even dislikes this meaning more than most, for it is a reflection on its favourite doctrine of withdrawal as the best relation between an artist and society. By minimizing or excluding the social term (that term by virtue of which the individual shares part of his response to a work of art with the civilization of which he is a part) the 'pure æsthetic judgment' simplifies and intolerably reduces the range of possible complexity in an individual's response to a work of art, and in the ways in which it may address itself to him. The whole æsthetic attitude exists to deny the enormous

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difficulties of communication by ignoring a large part of the problem, and thereby it recommends third-rate art. The fact, then, that the hypothetical aristocrats who symbolize Mencken's ideal of the good society would probably be exponents of the 'pure æsthetic judgment' is no small matter.

(3) The question of how these conceptions affect Mencken's concrete response to poetry may be answered painfully by two quotations from his essays, from the sentiments of which Mencken seems never to have swerved:

> 'In brief, poetry represents imagination's bold effort to escape from the cold and clammy facts that hedge us in—to soothe the wrinkled and fevered brow with beautiful balderdash'.
>
> 'Poetry, then, is capital medicine. First its sweet music lulls, and then its artful presentation of the beautifully improbable soothes and gives surcease. It is an escape from life, like religion, like enthusiasm, like glimpsing a pretty girl. And to the mere sensuous joy in it, to the mere low delight in getting away from the world for a bit, there is added, if the poetry be good, something vastly better, something reaching out into the realm of the intelligent, to wit, appreciation of good workmanship'.

This will answer the question asked earlier as to how closely Mencken's intentions resemble Pater's. Perhaps Mencken does not burn with a gemlike flame; but still, poetry is like religion to him also, and a means towards the longed-for escape from life.

Turning back now to Mencken's social criticism of America, one may understand a little better why, under the pleasure one took in reading it, there was an oppressive sense of emptiness. His social criticism does not relate to any adequate conception of civilized values. One is reminded of the epigrams of Wilde, and feels that the brilliance of invective, though so different in tone, has been nourished in both cases by that freedom to abuse that springs ultimately from irresponsibility and indifference. The insights of both men (and in Wilde they are frequently very impressive) often leave one dangling in mid-air from the end of some epigram one had hoped would lead back towards a practical urgency. And *The American Language* in a somewhat similar way leaves one dangling from the thread of its argument high up in an air which is now thoroughly small and dry.

II.

If the foregoing points have been made at tedious length, they at least confer the advantage of shortening what otherwise might have been a much longer discussion of *The American Language* itself. There are two assumptions in *The American Language* that should be analysed with some care: (1) the belief that the growth of language is anarchistic; that as long as language expands in a kind of wild growth it is alive, but that standards represent the cold hand of death—and by standards is meant not merely

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syntactical or pedagogical restraints, but any reference to a formal code or system of proprieties; the belief that words are noble savages and carry in themselves a thrill value that seems to rise in direct proportion to the eccentric vibrancy of the word. (2) The second assumption is that a great creative word-making period in a language may be indefinitely protracted, and maintained at a constant level of intensity. It would be possible, perhaps, to bring forward passages that might seem at variance with these assumptions as stated here. But the texture of Mencken's writing is loose, and one is sometimes confronted with statements that seem not easily to be reconciled, at least at any depth of probing to which it seems worthwhile carrying one's examination. But if these two propositions are occasionally out of sight, they are not often out of mind.

(1) Mencken wrote in 1923: 'I am against forbidding anybody to do anything, or say anything, or think anything so long as it is at all possible to imagine a habitable world in which he would be free to do, say, and think it'. The origin of this generous impulse has already been suggested: it arises from a distaste for those restraints that an ordered society is bound to impose on any attempt to relax the disciplines which hold it together in a solid front against the delusive profundity of the Unfathomable. But of course this is merely a way of putting it (derived from the unfortunate vocabulary that Mencken chose to use in a passage quoted earlier). What is really involved—and perhaps it is worth repeating—is the desire to escape the constant critical vigilance and the practical necessity of evaluating which such a society *should* impose. The doctrine of the Meaninglessness of Life conceals a good deal of solid physical comfort and intellectual leisure behind its heroic gesture. It is impatience with these deeper restraints that lurks, deceptively, behind Mencken's opposition to academic rules of language and sacrosanct syntax. These latter are straw men behind which the real attack on standards is conducted. For example, when Mencken attacks John Pickering for having written in 1816, ' . . . we should undoubtedly avoid all those words which are noticed by English authors of reputation as expressions with which they are unacquainted', he is only raising absurd old ghosts that every reader will help him lay again. But when, later, he quotes a long passage from James Fenimore Cooper's *The American Democrat*, the purpose of which is, not to urge restrictions on American English from the outside, but to refer American usage to some criterion that would neither arbitrarily impose British sanctions nor cater to American whimsicality, which would, in short, endeavour to find out a decorous central norm by which the deviations of American usage might be tested and the measure of their innate propriety gauged, the response which the reader is invited to give is not much different from that which (even without Mencken's help) he would bring to Pickering's absurd suggestion. Cooper, Mencken says, 'was always a snob'. The distinction between these two cases is sharp, and one is to be condemned as wholly as the other is to be

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respectfully and carefully considered. But Mencken blurs their edges, and would end by folding them together into a single condemnation. It is by such skilful strategy that he defends the absolute freedom of the word.

Mencken prefers what he once called the 'clang-tint' of words—a self-explanatory phrase. Delicate distinctions and shades of meaning are so disagreeable that he has developed a special talent for extinguishing them. He was once able to grow enthusiastic over the sound of the speech beginning, 'Not poppy, nor mandragora', but he found it 'almost meaningless'; and 'two-thirds of the charm of reading Chaucer', he remarked, 'comes out of the mere burble of words'. Sound and fury, but above all, novelty, is desirable. 'Traditional', Mencken has written, 'therefore irrational'.

Artistic freedom can be significant only in relation to some order of established permanencies. Where, in Mencken's world, could a writer find a moment of relative stability in the flux of words and phrases of sufficient duration to allow him to begin writing, or a language capable of offering a sufficient resistance to any creative intention to set up that internal organization of cross tensions and oppositions without which any piece of poetry or creative prose is lifeless? It may be objected that this excessive freedom is not in question, but it is difficult to find any principal of limitation or restraint intrinsic in the great disintegrative process that broods and threatens through these three volumes. Mencken has said that 'in nearly all first-rate novels the hero is defeated. In perhaps a majority he is completely destroyed'. Yet Mencken (and perhaps he has been intentionally sinister) has made the American language the hero of his philological treatise.

(2) The second assumption implicit in *The American Language* (that the word-making vitality of a language may be constant) is solidly entrenched in a set of quotations from scholars and critics who believe that modern American English is very near to Elizabethan English. These are made the basis of a deduction much larger than some of them (Virginia Woolf for instance) might have approved. But Charles E. Funk, who is more representative of the group, would hardly have registered his dissent from Mencken's final conclusions, for he writes: 'The art of neology is by no means dead or even decadent. It is distinctly alive and flourishing. Personally, I have no doubt that it is more robust than in the days of Shakespeare and Bacon, and that inventiveness of phrase is even more ingenious and delectable than in their day'.

The conditions under which unusual creative vigour in a language originates are usually difficult to isolate, and admit of little generalization. Such a vitality seen from the viewpoint of the health of the whole history of the language would be manifested differently at different times. Occasionally its immediate goals would seem to shift into positions irreconcilable with ones previously sought. But its final aim would be a maturity of speech in which, at least to-day, the complex and coloured density of the Elizabethan words and rhythms would enter at last into combinations with the

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contributions of all the later periods, including the orderliness and urbanity that we have from the Augustans, and the elegance that still comes to us from the remoter Carolines. The great age of Elizabethan word-making lasted perhaps twenty years, or a little more: that is, if we assume a close and vital connection between word-making and literature. If we do not, what is the importance of irrelevant word-making? For the complex life of a time is contained, not in the simple pattern of sound and meaning which a single word can hold, but in the infinitely complicated pattern that can be created from many such single strands. But Mencken's tendency (though by no means his invariable practice) is to consider the word-making activity independently of the discipline and tests that literature imposes. This prejudice leads him towards such far-fetched conceptions as: 'That large facility for concocting new and picturesque words which characterized the English of the Seventeenth Century had begun to yield by the last half of the century following [Mencken apparently does not distinguish in this great span of time between the language of Donne and Cowley, or between the vitality of Dekker and Cibber] to the policing of the purists, and thereafter its prodigies were transferred to America . . .'[2] Mencken ignores the fact that the Elizabethans had had strict word purists in such men as Spenser, Sir John Cheke, George Puttenham, and, a little later, William L'Isle, and that towards the middle of his immense period the Royal Academy began to exercise an influence over language in relation to which the reservations of Dr. Johnson were mild, and the restrictions of John Pickering and Henry Van Dyck on American English merely casual. Even if one has been able to overlook or deny the pressures of the exactingly refined Stuart society on language, it is difficult to understand how the presence of such sternly tangible disciplinarians of words could be entirely dismissed from the period Mencken marks out.

Transferring this liberal interpretation of the facts over to America, Mencken would have it that the great American period of word-making began before the American Revolution, and is stronger than ever to-day. But what an evaporation of values has been occurring at a steadily accelerating speed during even a short

[2]The above quotation is taken from *Supplement Two*, published in 1948. Ten years ago Mencken wrote in the Fourth Edition of *The American Language*: 'During the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries England was wracked by a movement to standardize the language, alike in vocabulary, in pronunciation and spelling, and it went far enough to set up artificial standards that still survive'. This earlier remark, which is factually more nearly correct, seems to me in flat opposition to the more recent statement. But the more recent statement lies much nearer the spirit of Mencken's whole attitude. It is, no doubt, his desire to contemplate the anarchistic vitality of words that has caused this temporary lapse of memory. The discrepancy beween these two quotations is not unusual, and points up the extremely shifting grounds of Mencken's writing.

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period in the time involved may be guessed by reading a page of Mark Twain followed by a page of Saroyan. And this is making the test at a pretty exalted level. American word-making has undeniably gathered facility, and what may even pass as aggressiveness (but hardly as courage). This is because the cellophane-wrapped propensities of contemporary urban standards have seen to it that the ride is downhill all the way. New words have no need to be in touch with genuine values if they are in touch with commercial values, or carry a snob appeal for New York Café Society and its equivalents throughout the West and South. Mencken is certainly aware of all this, but it is a matter of little consequence to him. There is an occasional warning (*e.g.*, 'All this boldness of conceit, of course, makes for vulgarity unrestrained by any critical sense'), but these warnings are too feeble and half-hearted (even if sincere) to be heard above the clamour of his practical approval. It is sheer quantity and clang-tint, and ultimately, the ability of words to escape facts rather than face them, that counts.

We find him, for example, noting with evident approval that by 1943, due to the presence of American troops, 'farmers' children deep in the heart of Ulster had learned to say, "Aw, lay off" ', and that 'Hi'ya, Babe' had become an acceptable form of greeting. To Mencken this is, apparently, vitality. At any rate, the relevant observation is neither made nor implied: that this does not represent a change in speech habits as importantly as it represents a deterioration in the quality of human relationships. In a similar fashion he praises the American vocabulary of denigration in preference to such English terms as *bounder, rotter, mucker*. 'Such terms as *bonehead, pinhead,* and *boob*', he writes, 'have been invented to take the place of the English *ass*'. Or again, 'He [the Englishman] knows nothing of our common terms of disparagement, such as *kike, wop, yap,* and *rube*. His pet name for a tiller of the soil is not *Rube* or *Cy*, but *Hodge*'. What Mencken chooses to ignore is the implicit but invariable reference to some code of conduct (however faint) in the English terms. The American terms (the list is long and would include such additions as *dope, spook, goon, knothead, fly-brain,* etc.) are contemptuous and insulting in an entirely different way, and it is open to question whether they are more degrading to the person who uses them or to the person to whom they are applied. Their intention is nothing less than degradation, for they have their origin in an ancient sense of inferiority (and perhaps guilt) seeking to escape from itself through brutality. A really useful and valuable treatise on American English would bring a scrutiny to the language that took full cognizance of elements such as this, but Mencken ignores the sociological and psychological background and tendency of words perhaps even more than he neglects their literary affiliations. He contends that the 'American *guy* meaning simply anybody' is a great improvement over the restricted English meaning of the word. But for anybody who has had the privilege of hearing *guy* in the American sense extensively used there can be little doubt that the tendency is to assume (however amiably

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or unconsciously) that literally *everybody* (including the user) is a *guy* in the English sense. Wide use of this and similar terms has extended a general invitation to the national cellar of self-respect. Probably Mencken is aware of this, but he perversely seems to approve of it. In the first place, he hates the American bourgeois so thoroughly that it may be gratifying to one of his bellicose temperament to see the enemy committing suicide in his own language. In the second place, he mistakenly assumes that his aristocrats of language are so far above the general condition of men that they can dip into the language lottery and come off with a prize every time, no matter how great the odds against them are. 'Shakespeare and his fellow-dramatists . . . exercised a sound discretion; . . . the slang of the Bankside was full of words and phrases which they were never tempted to use'. This is an insidious simplification of the relation between an artist and his language, but Mencken may really believe that Shakespeare, living to-day, could produce comparable work in the idiom of contemporary America (though he might have a more difficult time in his ancient home since 'the finicky and always anti-American Samuel Johnson' left his 'bow-wow English' behind him). Shakespeare, in fact, would seem to be the only thing that American English is waiting for. As Mencken puts it: '—as yet American suffers from the lack of a poet bold enough to venture into it, as Chaucer ventured into the despised English of his day, and Dante into the Tuscan dialect . . . '. It must be confessed that Mencken then proceeds, with almost frightening honesty, to make it clear what such a poet would be venturing into.

Supplement Two contains vast lists of words and phrases which the various occupations that make up any American city have contributed to the language. A large number of these words are professional or technical argot, and are not in wide popular use; but it is disheartening to observe (at least it is *my* impression from the lists given) that the occupation that seems to have impinged on the urban vocabulary most generally and successfully is the language of the beautician, with its bright euphemisms for embarrassing facts, its pseudo-scientific pretentiousness, and its heavy descents into professional jocosity, edged with an attempt at satirical overtones towards anyone who has intruded into that smug world insufficiently lubricated with loose coins and facile friendliness. And after the impact of the beautician on American English, the influence (but again this is only my personal impression) of the advertising agent seems to be next in line. Reading through these lists that Mencken has compiled (and for the lists themselves one must be very grateful) one is chiefly struck by how much further than one had supposed beyond the last likely hour for taking the imprint of a major poet American English has really gone. This is no fresh language, but a tired, thin-blooded language, deadly sophisticated in a popular way, and afraid to stop moving lest it should not easily get into motion again.

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In the very intelligent discussion of 'The English Language in America' which Harry Morgan Ayres contributed to *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, he remarked: 'The problem of American English resides, not in its difference from British English, nor yet in its own infinite variety . . . but in the attitude which it adopts towards itself'. It is impossible to find in Mencken's work the basis for any satisfactory attitude towards American English. The practical effect of such attitudes as run through *The American Language* would be to relinquish it into the hands of the commercial exploiters (where, to an alarming extent, it already finds itself). Edmund Wilson professed to find Mencken hopeful about the future of American English, but when one looks for signs of this hope one finds such passages as this: 'Given the poet, there may suddenly come a day when our *theirns* and *would'a hads* will take on the barbaric stateliness of the peasant locutions of old Maurya in "Riders to the Sea". They seem grotesque and absurd to-day because the folks who use them seem grotesque and absurd. In all human beings, if only understanding be brought to the business, dignity will be found, and that dignity cannot fail to reveal itself, soon or late, in the words and phrases with which they make known their high hopes and aspirations and cry out against the intolerable meaninglessness of life'.

If this is hope at all, it is very specious hope. It should be noted that our *theirns* and *would'a hads* is not the variety of Americanism about which Mencken has been most insistent (*rubberneck* is his own favourite American word); that Synge took over and charged with poetic overtones an idiom on the point of dissolution, and one to which he himself was an alien; that his plays were not written for the peasants themselves, but for a different audience altogether; and finally, I do not think that a language that winks at its own decay (and what else does Mencken suggest?) so that it can in some distant, blue, and twilight moment cry out against the intolerable meaninglessness of life is necessarily in a state of health. If this is the hope that Mr. Wilson once found in *The American Language*, I do not find it reassuring.

In discussing *The American Language* I have quoted both from the First Edition and the Fourth Edition without necessarily distinguishing between them. This seems to me justified since I am interested only in discovering Mencken's basic attitudes to words, and not in his scholarly attainments; and, from this point of view, the First Edition is sometimes more valuable since Mr. Mencken is more forthright there. The later editions represent a strategic and highly verbalized retreat from the areas of greatest exposure, but if Mr. Mencken has sometimes corrected and enlarged his erudition there is little evidence that he has ever shifted his sensibility.

MARIUS BEWLEY.

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'TIMON OF ATHENS'

TIMON has not been the subject of a great deal of criticism, but it has provoked more varying attempts at interpretation than many more popular plays. It is a work of collaboration. It is Shakespeare's incompletely worked-over version of an old play. It was left unfinished by Shakespeare and completed by Heywood, Tourneur, Wilkins, Chapman, Field and Middleton. It was written entirely by Shakespeare but is still unfinished. It is a morality play. It is a tragical satire. It is a topical drama on the evils of usury. It is the dullest of his mature works. It includes and transcends the great tragedies. It is the most Shakespearean of all plays not the greatest. One often feels that problems in Shakespeare criticism are problems about the critics rather than about Shakespeare, but here there are more radical difficulties. There has been much unnecessary speculation, but the uncertainty is to some extent inherent in Shakespeare's own handling of the theme. It is not, however, an uncertainty that leaves us completely at sea about his intentions.

It is necessary to say something on the question of authorship in order to determine with how much confidence one can proceed to a critical study of the play. A good illustration of the frustration that can take place is to be found in E. H. Wright's edition of the play (in the *Heath Shakespeare*, n.d. [1928]). The General Preface to the series states that 'the larger space has been devoted to the interpretative rather than the matter-of-fact order of scholarship', but when we turn to the introduction of the play itself, we find only two out of twenty-six pages devoted to a 'critical appreciation', and they are scarcely critical, the attitude being summed up in the sentence: 'Of a play so mutilated it is difficult to give a just critical interpretation' (p. xxx). It is therefore incumbent on me to say that I see no reason for believing that the play is nearly as mutilated as all that. I think Wright succeeds in proving that Shakespeare's was the first hand at work on the play as we have it[1]—what previous dramatic versions there may have been and whether they were known to him, we cannot tell—but I find his arguments that another hand completed the work entirely unconvincing. In spite of the ingenuity of some of Wright's conjectures, it is much easier to attribute the inconsistencies and loose ends of our text to a single author who had not finally revised his work than to suppose that a second author, called in to complete and tidy up an unfinished play, should have entirely failed to do so and should instead have introduced confusion for the first time into a draft which (according to Wright himself) had hitherto been free from it. There is no need to argue this at length, since it is now the most generally accepted view of the play—see E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, I, 482, and U. M. Ellis-Fermor,

[1]See especially pp. xxvii-xxix.

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Review of English Studies, XVIII (1942), especially p. 271. The subordinate question, how far the text we have is from completion, can be left without an exact answer.

There is perhaps no other play of Shakespeare in which attention is so much concentrated on the central figure, and even a slight misinterpretation of the way in which he is presented will gravely impair the understanding of the whole play. In this it differs somewhat from most of the other plays, in which there are a number of firmly placed characters to give us our bearings, so that if we make a mistake about one, we can pull ourselves up by seeing that our reading does not fit into the general pattern.[2] *Timon* is not devoid of pointers of this kind, but they are less obtrusive, and so error can propagate itself more easily.

The majority of critics have seen that the presentation of Timon is intensely critical throughout. His character has no balance or coherence; as Apemantus says: 'The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends'—and this in behaviour as well as in fortune. On this score at least, there can be no objection to the sharp duality in the structure of the play—it is a clear schematic presentation of an unintegrated personality. And we are prepared for what happens right from the start: the Jacobean audience[3] can have had no difficulty in making the right response to prodigality and susceptibility to flattery. It would, as O. J. Campbell says, see 'in Timon's response to this adulation, not generosity but self-satisfaction at the display of his own munificence'.[4] Why, then, has there been a recurrent tendency among critics to make Timon out to be a more sympathetic figure than Shakespeare meant him to be? Partly, I think, it is subservience to classification and theory—to the traditional classification of *Timon* as a tragedy, and to quasi-philosophical theories (which do not apply too well to the great tragedies either) of what tragedy should be. To this we owe some of the talk about Timon's 'essential nobility',[5] and even about the 'tragic flaw' in his character. As a corrective to this, Campbell's description of the play as a tragical satire is useful. It is, for him, a play of the kind that Ben Jonson wrote in *Sejanus*, transferring to tragedy some of the methods with which he had experimented in his 'comicall satyres', where the pervading emotions evoked are those of 'moral repulsion, scorn and derision'.[6] I do not think that this accounts for everything we find

[2] *Cf.* Miss Ellis-Fermor (*R.E.S.*, XVIII, 282): 'Unlike *Hamlet*, unlike *Lear*, the play of *Timon* does not endow its minor characters with the function of focusing, by their nature and actions, our thought and attention on its central figure'.

[3] I do not imply that a Jacobean audience ever saw *Timon*: only that Shakespeare started to write it as a play.

[4] *Shakespeare's Satire*, p. 186.

[5] J. E. Phillips: *The State in Shakespeare's Greek and Roman Plays*, p. 138; *cf.* also p. 144 for the 'tragic flaw'.

[6] *Op. cit.*, p. 182 (referring to *Sejanus* and *Volpone*).

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in *Timon*, and Campbell has to bully the text at times to fit in with his view, but there is much that is more intelligible from this point of view, which helps to free us from certain preconceptions.

But there are better grounds for the idealization of Timon, and they must now be considered. When all allowance has been made for interested adulation, there remain a number of laudatory comments throughout the play that cannot be accounted for on those grounds, and that prevent us from treating it as a purely satirical study of senseless prodigality. The most obviously detached and choric of these comments is that of the Stranger in III, i:

> I never tasted Timon in my life,
> Nor came any of his bounties over me,
> To mark me for his friend; yet, I protest,
> For his right noble mind, illustrious virtue,
> And honourable carriage,
> Had his necessity made use of me,
> I would have put my wealth into donation,
> And the best half should have returned to him,
> So much I love his heart. (85-93).

Then there are the speeches of Flavius throughout; and the play ends with Alcibiades' epitaph on 'noble Timon': there may be some incoherence here, some failure on Shakespeare's part to work out the full implications of his conception, but there is certainly complexity.

Various explanations help to account for the apparent contradictions. The play is perhaps the one which, of all Shakespeare's, falls most easily within the framework of an Aristotelian moral scheme, and Timon, both before and after his fall, is clearly an example of excess. Prodigality is a vice, but the natural disposition on which it depends is intrinsically good, and, if properly directed by reason, manifests itself in the virtue of generosity. Potentially, then, Timon does possess all the noble qualities with which he is credited. If anything more is required to account for the force with which the Stranger in particular expresses himself, it can be found in the fact that, whatever Timon's faults, he has certainly been wronged by those whom he has benefited—even unreasoning prodigality creates some claim to requital. Moreover Timon's prodigality is shown as a particular manifestation of the pursuit of false values by Athens as a community—he has been corrupted by the corruption of the state. To take only one instance in which this motif is employed, when the senators propose to Timon that he should return to Athens they offer him—significant juxtaposition—'heaps and sums of love and wealth' (V, i, 157). This side of the play has been well worked out by J. E. Phillips (*op. cit.*), and there are good remarks in the article by A. S. Collins (*R.E.S.* XXII, 1946, pp. 96-108), so that I shall not dwell on it. If, as seems to me probable, the play is unfinished, this is a theme that might have received fuller treatment, along with that of Alcibiades. This

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is about as much as it is profitable to say without a detailed survey of the text, but it will do as a provisional account of how far and in what sense we are encouraged to attribute nobility to Timon. It is now time to turn to the way in which the theme is presented in action.

It is customary to contrast Timon in his prosperity with Timon after his fall, and I do not think sufficient stress has been laid on the fact that when the play opens he is already ruined. It is true that we do not know this for certain at the very start, but there is an ominous atmosphere about even the first scene that makes it only the fulfilment of what we have expected when Timon's ruin is first announced by Flavius in I, ii. We have had the well-worn apologue of the hill of Fortune, and the hope, after a vivid description of Timon's prodigality, 'Long may he live in fortunes' (293). No audience could doubt what that meant. The impending fate is foreshadowed also in less obtrusive ways: as E. A. Armstrong has pointed out (*Shakespeare's Imagination*, p. 37), the collocation of 'a wide sea of wax' (48) and 'an eagle flight' (50) carries a submerged reference to the melting of the waxen wings of Icarus. The insubstantiality of the glittering pageant is suggested in the opening lines: 'Magic of bounty! all these spirits thy power Hath conjured to attend' (6-7). The picture of Fortune which the Poet presents is almost like a challenge on Shakespeare's part—he announces that he is going to deal with one of the most familiar of commonplaces, and prompts our interest in the question how he is going to give an individual turn to it; as the painter says:

> 'Tis common:
> A thousand moral paintings I can show
> That shall demonstrate these quick blows of Fortune's
> More pregnantly than words (91-4).

This crucial opening scene holds the balance delicately between the two extremes to be avoided in our attitude towards Timon. It is the one scene in which there is clear indication of genuine personal feeling in his generosity, and it is shown in contrast with a typical representative of the spirit of Athens, the 'old Athenian'. Timon as shown here is not adequately described by the more rigorous critics, such as Warwick Bond: 'the great spendthrift, avoiding all that is unpleasant, allowing himself to expand in a foolish glow of lazy benevolence, and prompted as much by love of admiration and flattery as by a real charity' (*Modern Language Review*, XXVI, 1931, p. 53), and Campbell: 'The similarity of his response to each one of these adulators in turn makes his generosity seem automatic and therefore ridiculous' (*op. cit.* p. 187). This episode breaks that 'similarity'; but at the same time it does show the subtle corruption exercised by the materialistic spirit of Athens. Timon cannot really overcome it; he can only outbid it in its own currency of gold—and it is a further irony that he cannot, by now, even do that: the audience is already conscious that his

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'to build his fortune I will strain a little' is a grim understatement of his financial embarrassments. This theme of the impossibility of genuinely defeating the ethos of Athens is perhaps best expressed in a passage of detached comment at the end of the scene, where one of the Lords remarks: 'no gift to him But breeds the giver a return exceeding All use of quittance' (289-91). We are soon to learn that Timon has been having recourse to usurers in the literal sense, but the implications of these lines are more profound: by his habit of lavish recompense Timon is turning even those who ostensibly give him free gifts into usurers, more successful usurers than the real ones: the word 'breeds' evokes all the traditional doctrines about 'barren metal'.[7] In this sense of the guilt shared both by lender and borrower, and infecting all transactions in a usurious society, lies the advance in complexity in Shakespeare's treatment of usury since *The Merchant of Venice*. For this reason, I am unable to go very far with J. W. Draper, who uses the fact that the theme occurs in both plays as evidence for an idealizing picture of Timon as 'a sort of liberal young Bassanio, who, without the moneyed backing of Antonio and Portia, experienced to his sorrow the hard economic facts of the Jacobean age'.[8] In the fairy-tale atmosphere of *The Merchant of Venice* we have a clear naïve contrast between good and bad; there is no consciousness that Antonio and Bassanio are contributing to the debasement of moral standards by having recourse to Shylock, who can be lightheartedly treated as a scapegoat. No doubt Draper is right in suggesting that the Jacobean audience would still have been willing to accept a presentation in these terms, but Shakespeare was no longer prepared to give it to them. In *The Merchant of Venice* there is no criticism implied of Antonio, whose losses were 'enow to press a royal merchant down' (IV, i, 29); in the more politically conscious milieu of *Timon*, as I hope to show, words like 'royal' have a different connotation.

This first scene has foreshadowed the approaching fall, and has shown us in some measure how even the more genuinely fine sides of Timon's nature are corrupted by the spirit of his society, but on the whole we have so far seen him at his best. It is in the second scene that his failings become more apparent. It is here that the conceptions of 'bounty' and 'goodness' begin to receive penetrating criticism. Already in I, ii, the merchant's obviously

[7] *Cf.* II, i, 7ff, where the unnaturalness of this 'breeding' is stressed by the grotesque picture of the horse that foals twenty when given to Timon.

[8] *Modern Language Review*, XXIX (1934), p. 31. The contrast between the two plays in this respect is stressed in an article by E. C. Pettet, *R.E.S.* XXIII, 321-36. The present paper was completed before Mr. Pettet's appeared, and I have been able to do no more than note occasional agreements and dissents. Mr. Pettet emphasizes the favourable picture of Timon in his clash with the 'Old Athenian'.

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interested reference to Timon's 'untirable and continuate goodness' has caught our attention. Perhaps we are already meant to have a sense of its being too much 'on tap'—'automatic' in Campbell's phrase already quoted—and when Lucilius says 'never may That state or fortune fall into my keeping Which is not owed to you!' it is clear that Timon is in danger of complacently accepting superhuman honours. But in the second scene this aspect of the treatment is greatly elaborated, and there is much more stress on Timon's attitude towards his own behaviour. He has no true sense of reciprocity in friendship: 'there's none Can truly say he gives if he receives', and if he seems to recant that later in the scene—'what need we have any friends, if we should ne'er have need of them?'—the contradiction merely emphasizes his irresponsible attitude, and throughout this speech his ideal of 'brothers commanding one another's fortunes' does not get beyond the stage of daydreaming. By this time it has already been clearly indicated that Timon is not merely emotionally self-indulgent but also presumptuous. Apemantus has struck the warning note with his gnomic: 'Feasts are too proud to give thanks to the gods', and once the true situation of Timon's fortunes has been revealed by Flavius, the references come faster. Timon, says one of the Lords, is 'the very soul of bounty'. He himself says: 'Methinks, I could deal kingdoms to my friends, And ne'er be weary', and he regrets that Apemantus baulks him in the indulgence of his temperament: 'if thou wert not sullen, I would be good to thee'. It is not merely that he lives in an unreal world: he is soaring, like Icarus (see above on I, i, 48), into a sphere that is not his as a man and a private individual. The honours he aspires to are now royal,[9] now even divine. Right to the end he clings to these presumptions, and when he finally takes leave of the world, it is as a king manqué, and with an exhortation to his macrocosmic counterpart to join him in oblivion: 'Sun, hide thy beams! Timon hath done his reign (V, i, 228).

It will be best at this point to interrupt the chronological order and to trace this theme through the subsequent acts. For some time the spotlight is upon the baseness of Timon's beneficiaries rather than on his own failings, and this part of the play culminates in the choric comment of the Stranger in III, ii, 84-95, which is indeed to be taken seriously, but not as cancelling out the other side of the presentation. It makes an appearance in Flavius's speech in II, i, where there is the usual reference to bounty (174) and the flatterers are quoted as saying: 'Great Timon, noble, worthy, royal Timon'—not, as I have already suggested, with the same naïve approval with which Antonio is compared to a 'royal merchant'. We may indeed accept the claim: 'Unwisely, not ignobly, have I given' (184), but the whole context forbids us to forget that wisdom,

[9] *Cf.* 'Near! why then another time I'll hear thee' (I, ii, 186-7) with Caesar's 'What touches us ourself shall be last served' (*Julius Caesar*, III, i, 8)—a proper attitude in a ruler but presumption in a private person.

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prudence, is a considerable part of human virtue in its widest sense.

The critical attitude towards this sort of 'goodness' is firmly established by the time we come, after the fall, to Flavius's paradoxical summing-up of Timon's fate:

> Undone by goodness.[10] Strange, unusual blood,
> When man's worst sin is, he does too much good!
> Who then dares to be half so kind again?
> For bounty, that makes gods, does still mar men.
>
> (IV, ii, 38-41).

I think Shakespeare is here using his gnomic technique with a good deal of subtlety. We are meant to accept what Flavius says, but not to regard him as having adequate insight into Timon's nature, and the special connotations that the play has given to 'goodness' and 'bounty' enable us to achieve both these ends at once. For Flavius, his old master is in a straightforward sense 'too good for this world', but the audience is meant to take his comments, which for the speaker are really a confession of inability to understand the ways of the universe, as literal truth. The audience can see, if Flavius—his heart stronger than his head—cannot, that an attempt on the part of man to ape divine bounty, ever spontaneously giving without receiving anything in return, is presumptuous and must inevitably be frustrated. It is characteristic of Timon that he cannot grasp the notion of the necessary reciprocity of creation. This is the point of the curious lines, IV, iii, 442-8, beginning: 'the sun's a thief'. Since for Timon giving must be only giving, receiving only receiving, even if he has in his adversity expected a reversal of the roles, the normal processes of give-and-take in nature[11] appear as thievery, on the analogy of the corrupted society of Athens, which has also lost the notion of reciprocity; which has, indeed, destroyed it in Timon's mind. Flavius's own goodness, in contrast, is the genuine, human thing: his determination to seek out Timon and serve him is immediately and ironically followed by Timon's soliloquy: 'O blessed breeding sun'. And human, *costing* generosity has already been presented in III, v, a scene introducing a motif which I suspect Shakespeare would have exploited more fully if he had completed the play. Alcibiades, who pleads for his friend's life, and has kept back the state's foes is 'rich only in large hurts' (111).

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[10]Ruth L. Anderson in her article, *Excessive Goodness a Tragic Flaw* (*Shakespeare Association Bulletin*, XIX, 1944, pp. 85-96), traces this theme through the plays to its culmination in *Timon*, but without any very penetrating insight into the specific way in which it occurs in each play.

[11]Recognized in IV, iii, 68-9: 'But then renew I could not like the moon; There were no suns to borrow of'. This reciprocity is forcibly conveyed in a chapter of Rabelais (III, iii) which some—*e.g.* W. König, *Sh. Jahrbuch* IX (1874), 202-6—have plausibly thought that Shakespeare had in mind.

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Like 'bounty' and 'goodness', 'free' is a word which meets with keen criticism in the course of the play. The words are linked directly in Flavius's gnomic couplet which closes Act II:

> I would I could not think it: that thought is bounty's foe;
> Being free itself, it thinks all others so.

And 'free' occurs with a subtle gradation of senses in various passages. The very first time it occurs is in I, i, 46, in the middle of the concealed Icarus allusion to which I have referred already: there is something ominous about the 'free drift' that 'moves itself in a wide sea of wax'. The next two occurrences have a sense of paradox about them: the 'slaves and servants' of the Poet's representation of Timon 'through him drink the free air' (83-4); and the implication that Timon's 'freeness' is oppressive to its recipients is even more directly expressed when to his 'I'll pay the debt and free him', the messenger rejoins 'your lordship binds him ever'. It adds to the irony that Ventidius does not in fact consider himself bound when Timon really needs him, but Timon's bounty is of the kind that offers a temptation to throw off the rather stifling burden it imposes. We are ready by this time to let any passing allusions have their effect. The next, a fairly colourless 'freely' in I, III, need not detain us. Then in the next scene Ventidius makes an attempt to restore Timon's gift to his 'free heart' (6), but it is refused—Timon 'gave it freely ever', and it turns out that this time Ventidius takes him at his word for good. Another, more humdrum sense of the word is introduced when Apemantus prays never to trust 'a keeper with my freedom' (70). The 'five best senses' follow the prevailing tone when they 'come freely to gratulate thy plenteous bosom' (132-3); and the interested donors claim to be making their gifts out of 'free love' (191). The theme naturally becomes less prominent as the play advances. Lucullus, in his greedy expectation of further gifts refers to 'that honourable, complete, free-hearted gentleman of Athens, thy very bountiful good lord and master' (II, i, 11-13), combining all the words I have been discussing; and in the last reference before his ruin, Timon ironically combines the play's primary sense for the world 'generous', with the more prosaic, Apamantean sense of mere freedom from restraint:

> Have I been ever free, and must my house
> Be my retentive enemy, my gaol? (III, iv, 82-3).

In the last two acts we have one concentrated use, where Timon looks back on the past and talks of

> The sweet degrees that this brief world affords
> To such as may the passive drudges of it
> Freely command (IV, iii, 254-6).

There is in this phrase a detail of interpretation that has more than purely textual significance. I have quoted the reading of the Oxford

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Shakespeare, which many other modern editors also print. The Folio has 'drugges' and other editors read 'drugs'. I am not convinced that it is necessary to choose firmly between the two, and suspect that there is a conscious pun. Timon has commanded the 'drugs' of worldly wealth, which are passive, capable of use both as drugs in our modern sense and as poisons (the usual Shakespearean meaning); he has also commanded passive, human drudges —an added irony in that Timon's 'free' behaviour involved the slavery of others. This pun would work if the two words could be pronounced alike, and the *O.E.D.* instances (s.v. *drudge*) from Huloet and Greene point to a variant pronounciation 'drug'. There is a curious verbal link-up with Shakespeare's other usury play, *The Merchant of Venice*, where gold is the 'pale and common drudge 'Tween man and man' (III, ii, 103-4), which might suggest that even with the interpretation 'drudge' there was in the *Timon* passage no necessary reference to human beings, but I think it enriches the passage to suppose that there is. If I am right, the pun is an extremely pregnant one, concentrating in a single word the reduction of men to a cash basis.[12] But even if one had to choose either 'drugs' or 'drudges' as the single sense, the irony in 'freely' would remain. Timon could command them freely, without hindrance, but to be able to do this carries no particular aura of 'free' generosity, as Timon was once made to believe.

This Act, like Act II, ends with a gnomic couplet in which the word 'free' occurs, this time in its more colourless sense: 'fly, whilst thou art blest and free'. In Act V there is only one instance, when the Poet urges: 'find what thou wantst by free and offered light'. Even if it should be thought unwise to read profound significance into all these occurrences of the word, it does run through the play in a noteworthy fashion, and helps to enhance its ironic and critical attitude towards unreflective bounty.

The following of these themes through the play has, I hope, shown the coherence of Shakespeare's attitude towards Timon's 'bounty'. It is now time to look more closely at certain peculiarities of the play's structure. It is only a very superficial study that can give rise to the judgment sometimes made that it is really two plays 'casually joined at the middle' (M. Van Doren: *Shakespeare*, p. 288). But some of the defences of Shakespeare against charges that need never have been brought are unsatisfactory. Several critics have commented on the 'bare nature of the drama' (Campbell, p. 170), and the 'queer formal schematism' (*id.*, p. 169), and both Van Doren and A. S. Collins (*R.E.S.*, XXII, 1946, 96-108) stress the abstract, morality treatment. This is clearly an element in the play's technique, but neither of these critics has escaped the danger of treating forms and conventions as if they had more explanatory force than they have. When, for instance, Van Doren writes:

[12] *Cf.* Kenneth Muir in *Modern Quarterly Miscellany*, I (1947), 71-6 for Karl Marx's comments on IV, iii, 26-44 and 384-95; and also Pettet, *R.E.S.*, XXIII, 334.

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'Timon is not so much a man as a figure representing Munificence, an abstraction in whom madness may not matter' (p. 289), one asks why should it not matter. If the Morality convention had this sort of irrelevance to real problems, it would be a curiously frivolous thing. And in fact there is no need for any such subterfuges. Timon is, if you like, a simplified, schematized figure; but Shakespeare makes it quite clear that his madness does 'matter', that his prodigality is to be judged by ordinary moral standards. Equally inacceptable is Collins's version in which 'the abstract Virtue' of Bounty is transformed 'to a similarly abstract Vice' (p. 104). Collins does not really, as the better parts of his valuable essay show, read the play as any such unearthly ballet of bloodless categories, but he is betrayed into this account through taking as the moral of the early acts that 'such Ideal Bounty should have infinity of riches to draw on, for it is Noble Bounty' (p. 99). That, complete to the capital letters, is no doubt how Timon sees himself in the distorting mirror provided by his flatterers, but it is not how the audience sees him, and it does not make sense of the play. The two halves of it are contrasting studies in excess, and both excesses quite intelligibly belong to the same character. This element of the play is summed up in Timon's reply to Apemantus's statement that he is proud 'that I was No prodigal'—'I, that I am one now' (IV, iii, 278-9). It is the same nature that, according to circumstances and the twist they have given him, can turn to love or hate, but to each with prodigality, and the gold that embodies the corrupted and corrupting spirit of Athens affords an equally fit instrument for the expression of each.

Timon's invective has often been compared with that of Lear. Biographically-minded critics have even suggested that the emotion which Shakespeare has just been able to keep in check and express in the form of art in *Lear* has got the better of him in *Timon*, but I think that both the similarity and the differences can readily be explained on artistic grounds. Timon like Lear 'hath ever but slenderly known himself'. He will not listen to the truth—'he will not hear till feel', says Flavius (II, ii, 7)—and when Flavius tries to enlighten him he retorts: 'come, sermon me no further' (II, ii, 182). The difference between him and Lear after their falls is that Lear learns by his misfortune as Timon does not. That does not mean that there is no substance in his tirades—much of them consists of the stock-in-trade of the traditional moral satirist—but there is no hint of insight or wisdom behind them. One might express the difference between Lear and Timon by saying that Lear in affliction comes to *see* as he never did before; the utmost Timon attains to is to *see through* particular shams and injustices. Unlike Lear who finally welcomes and values love, he grudges it when the disinterested affection of Flavius forces him to modify his wholesale condemnation of mankind (IV, iii, 499ff). When, a few lines earlier, he has said: 'I never had honest man about me; ay, all I kept were knaves, to serve in meat to villains' (486-7), he has not merely exaggerated, he has been utterly wrong, since at the

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risk of undue simplification Shakespeare has insisted that all Timon's servants, in contrast to his flatterers, are faithful to him and have a genuine affection for him (IV, ii). The picture is perhaps modified by the curious incomplete suggestions of a wisdom by withdrawal to be achieved only in death, but there is no direct connection between that and his sufferings—it is '*nothing*' that brings him 'all things' (V, i, 193).

If Collins invokes the morality form in order to escape seeing some of the very un-ideal elements in the presentation of Timon's 'bounty', Campbell's classification of the play as through and through satiric errs in the opposite direction. The comparison with Jonson's *Sejanus* and *Volpone* illuminates much, but it involves cavalier treatment of several portions of the play, and leads Campbell into at least one manifest misreading of what actually happens. It is part of his thesis that an attitude of scorn and mockery persists right to the end, and in order to help him to believe this he has persuaded himself to follow those critics who have held that Timon's death is suicide, a view for which the text affords no warrant. Reaction against what he regards as the sentimentality of Wilson Knight and Van Doren has induced in him such a hard-boiled attitude that he can write: 'even his choice of a grave is food for scorn' (p. 192), and quote in the same paragraph:

> Come not to me again; but say to Athens,
> Timon hath made his everlasting mansion
> Upon the beached verge of the salt flood,
> Who once a day with his embossed froth
> The turbulent surge shall cover: thither come,
> And let my grave-stone be your oracle (V, i, 219-24).

One may distrust such biographical conjectures as that 'in Timon's tomb Shakespeare buried his own bitterness',[13] but to deny that something has happened to Timon here that does not happen to Sejanus or Volpone is to refuse to read the text. So with:

> my long sickness
> Of health and living now begins to mend,
> And nothing brings me all things (V, i, 191-3).

It is perhaps a fair comment that this is fragmentary, that Shakespeare has not really developed it organically out of the theme, even that failure to do so may have been his reason for abandoning the play unfinished, but it is no good pretending that it is not there: and it disrupts Campbell's neat scheme.

Having followed Timon's progress to this intangible and mysterious consummation (which is itself qualified by the admittedly 'satiric' final couplet uttered by Timon: V, i, 227-8), I must turn to a brief consideration of some of the subordinate themes of the play, which bear, more than the central one, the marks of incompleteness.

[13]Van Doren, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

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The political theme of the corruption and materialism of Athenian society I have referred to at several points, and it can be studied in detail in Phillips's *The State in Shakespeare's Greek and Roman Plays*. It is not, I think, notably incomplete except where it interlocks with the Alcibiades theme. Most critics have seen the importance of the contrast between Timon and Alcibiades in their responses to Athenian baseness.[14] Collins has given perhaps the best account of what Alcibiades means for the play, in stressing how in III, v, 'a real man has pleaded for his friend' (*loc. cit.*, p. 104), and how, at the end of the play with Alcibiades' return to Athens 'sanity, with common decency, is restored: there shall be human-heartedness again' (p. 107); but he destroys some of the effect of his criticism by exaggerating the contrast in technique between the handling of Timon and that of Alcibiades—the criticism of Timon that is implied in the figure of Alcibiades is much more telling than it would be if Timon were, as Collins writes, an 'abstract Virtue almost ready to be transformed to a similarly abstract Vice' (p. 104). In fact it is hard to see how a play could successfully work simultaneously on those two levels. The contrast is not (Collins, p. 90) between Idealism and Realism but between an inhuman excess and a balanced humanity. Alcibiades can see what is wrong with Athens: 'Banish usury' (III, v, 101), and he is not provoked to indiscriminate[15] hatred: 'I will use the olive with my sword' (V, iv, 82). Only the outlines of the theme are indicated,[16] but the intention is clear. The other exemplar of human-heartedness in the play, the steward Flavius, is treated in more detail, in several of Shakespeare's most tenderly beautiful scenes. (I find it significant that Campbell, in making out the treatment to be satirical throughout, is led to ignore the roles of both Flavius and Alcibiades in the

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[14]See for example F. S. Boas: *Shakespeare and his Predecessors*, p. 501. This book has one of the better short treatments of the play in general works on Shakespeare.

[15]Timon is indiscriminate in both halves of the play: 'thou'rt an Athenian, therefore, welcome' (I, ii, 35-6), and 'the gods confound—hear me, you good gods all—The Athenians both within and out that wall' (IV, i, 37-8).

[16]To me, as to Miss Ellis-Fermor, III, v, reads like a vigorous roughing-out of a scene that was not finally revised. Neither it nor V, iv, the only ones in which Alcibiades figures to any purpose, is at all clearly integrated into its context. The appearance of Phrynia and Timandra with Alcibiades in IV, iii, is puzzling. As it stands it affords an occasion for Timon's invective but I cannot see that it helps to elucidate the Alcibiades theme. I should be reluctant to regard it as intended to indicate that the claims of Alcibiades in the final scene to regenerate Athens are to be taken cynically. The specific suggestion Miss Ellis-Fermor makes, that the unknown soldier of III, v, was to have been Timon himself, has no plausibility.

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play). In him, and in Timon's other servants, we see genuine personal affection, contrasting strongly with Timon's automatism.

In the absence of a full development of the Alcibiades theme, the other main contrast of the play, that between Timon and Apemantus, perhaps assumes undue prominence. Here there is no doubt that especially in Act IV this part of the play is relatively near completion. There is less of Apemantus in the first three Acts, but perhaps about as much as Shakespeare meant there to be. In the earlier scenes, Apemantus falls easily enough under the type of 'scurrilous and profane jester' first introduced by Jonson in *Every Man out of his Humour* in the person of Carlo Buffone. No radical criticism of a specific kind is conveyed by his railing. In Act IV he is able to argue with Timon on equal terms, and is given some of the most impressive poetry of the play. In spite of this and in spite of the superficially keen play of dialectic, he seems even more ineffective than before. In the earlier scene his effectiveness had been neutralized in advance by the information that

> even he drops down
> The knee before him, and returns in peace,
> Most rich in Timon's love (I, i, 61-3).

And in Act IV the audience knows that he is arguing on false premisses, since Timon has discovered his new store of gold, and does not act the misanthrope 'enforcedly' (IV, iii, 242). But even if this were not so, we can see that Timon would still be right in saying 'thou flatter'st misery' (235). Apemantus's speech beginning 'thou has cast away thyself' (221) is such a characteristic piece of Shakespeare's mature verse that we tend to overlook how unnecessary it is for Timon to have all this pointed out to him. It is not only unnecessary, it becomes clear as the scene proceeds that from Timon's point of view it is a falsely romantic picture. Apemantus for all his cynicism has a picture of a finely incorruptible 'nature' refusing to flatter man—a picture made in his own image, and one to which, in turn, he strives to approximate even more closely. The core of Timon's criticism of cynicism is in the long speech beginning at 329: 'a beastly ambition'. The real animal world, in contrast to Apemantus's idealized picture, is just as full of conflict and inequality as the human—'what beast couldst thou be, that were not subject to a beast'. If Timon himself later wishes 'that beasts may have the world in empire', it is from pure hatred of mankind, not from any idealization of beasts. All this does not mean that we are asked to share Timon's total vision—I have already commented on the failure of insight shown in the speech, 'the sun's a thief'—but it does dispose of Apemantus's essentially sentimental and self-indulgent cynicism. One could have prophesied Shakespeare's attitude towards a philosophy of life that took the dog as its ideal.

It would be natural to hope to follow up a piece-meal treatment of themes by an attempt to see them together in a coherent picture,

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and it is the radical criticism of the play that, unless I have badly failed to read it aright, this is not possible. At a highly abstract level, it is easier to summarize without serious distortion than any other of the plays. To say that it is a study of a potentially noble but unbalanced and prodigal nature, corrupted by a usurious and materialistic society with its flattery, and thrown off his balance and plunged into an equally extreme and indiscriminate misanthropy when the loss of his wealth discovers the falsehood of his friends—to say this is probably a less hopelessly inadequate account of 'what the play is about' than could be given for any other important play of Shakespeare. But once we descend from such generalities, and attempt an analysis in terms of individual themes, there seems to be less over and above, or rather encompassing, those themes than in the greatest works. Each is worked out with passion and brilliance, though to different degrees of completeness; yet whole-hearted encomiums of the play as a whole always give the impression of special pleading, and all attempts to make it out to be all of a piece are unduly schematic and incomplete. Nor does this mean simply that the play is too rich and varied to be brought under a systematic description. On the contrary one feels that it is a play that ought to have been neat and shapely—it aims more at the qualities of *Coriolanus* than of *Antony and Cleopatra* or *Lear*, and it has the promise of a more interesting and profound play than *Coriolanus*. It is easy to be wise after the event, and to say that Shakespeare chose a theme that was too exaggerated or too monotonous or what you will. There is no harm in such conjecture. All we can say for certain—a few critics would deny even this—is that Shakespeare did not bring his work on the play to a satisfying state of completion. That he could not have done so, who would venture to say?

J. C. MAXWELL.

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THE NOVEL AS DRAMATIC POEM (III):

'THE EUROPEANS'

I HAVE before in these pages recorded the conviction that *The Europeans* is a masterpiece—one that, like *Hard Times*, has gone without recognition because of its virtues as a work of art: it is wholly and intensely significant, and the accepted ideas about 'the novel' induce blindness towards such virtues. *The Europeans* is 'slight'—that seems to have been the general verdict (William James's concurrence in which the author took especially hard). And it is true that Henry James's touch in what must be admitted to be a short novel is light, and that the mode belongs decidedly to comedy. But that is not to say that a light touch cannot be sure or comedy profound, or that a serious burden cannot be conveyed in two hundred pages. The liveliness, which ought surely to have been found attractive, lends itself to illustration, but the stress must fall on the closeness with which the interest is organized: I have called *The Europeans* a 'moral fable' because a serious intention expresses itself in so firm and clear an economy of organization, and the representative significance of every element in the book is so insistent.

What we have, in fact, is a comparative inquiry, enacted in dramatic and poetic terms, into the criteria of civilization, and the possibilities—a kind of inquiry that issues out of a radical bent of preoccupation engendered in James by his peculiar life and history. He is peculiarly qualified to give us the interplay of different traditions, and, his being a profoundly serious mind, the upshot of the interplay as he presents it transcends the vindication of one side against the other, or the mere setting forth of the for and against on both sides in a comedy of implicit mutual criticism. The informing spirit of the drama is positive and constructive: James is unmistakably feeling towards an ideal possibility that is neither Europe nor America.

At the opening of the book it might appear that New England was to be the subject as well as the scene—unsophisticated and provincial New England presented through the surprised eyes of the visiting European cousins, whose experience of a riper world was to provide a critical irony, sometimes more and sometimes less indulgent. But it becomes immediately apparent that the criticism is not going to preclude a good deal of strongly positive appreciation. It becomes further apparent, in due course, that we have to make a radical distinction between the two Europeans—that they stand for different things: they have, in their symbolic capacities, different —even conflicting—values.

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Felix, who of the pair is, in speech and attitude, very much the less critical and the more appreciative of New England, actually constitutes, by his dramatic and poetic part in the fable, by far the more damaging criticism. The note of his report, when he comes back to his sister in the hotel at Boston from his visit, 'among the meadows and woods', to the home of the Wentworths ('he had found that the big unguarded door stood open with the trustfulness of the golden age'), is enchantment:

> ' "Is it handsome—is it elegant?" asked the Baroness. Felix looked at her a moment, smiling. "It's very clean! No splendours, no gilding, no troops of servants; rather straight-backed chairs. But you might eat off the floors, and you can sit down on the stairs".
>
> "That must be a privilege. And the inhabitants are straight-backed too, of course".
>
> "My dear sister!" cried Felix, "the inhabitants are charming".
>
> "In what style?"
>
> "In a style of their own. How shall I describe it? It's primitive; it's patriarchal; it's the *ton* of the golden age".
>
> "And have they nothing golden but their *ton*? Are there no symptoms of wealth?"
>
> "I should say there was wealth without symptoms. A plain homely way of life; nothing for show, and very little for—what shall I call it?—for the senses; but a great *aisance,* and a lot of money, out of sight, that comes forward very quietly for subscriptions to institutions, for repairing tenements, for paying doctor's bills; perhaps even for portioning daughters" '.

But, pressed by Eugenia, Felix has to admit that the inhabitants are not gay:

> ' "They are sober; they are even severe. They are of a pensive cast; they take things hard. I think there is something the matter with them; they have some melancholy memory or some depressing expectation. It's not the epicurean temperament" '.

It is Gertrude, the younger daughter, who, as her case becomes plain to us, turns this perception of Felix's into a strong criticism of the Puritan ethos. She is 'restless', she is difficult and unsettled—that, in the family, is her recognized character; and there is an agreement to assume that she will marry Mr. Brand, who, earnest young Unitarian minister and professional representative of the cult of duty and responsibility, 'understands' her and will be a steadying influence. On the bright spring morning on which Felix calls and finds her alone to receive him in the Wentworth home, she has with characteristic 'oddity' first sent her sister Charlotte off, puzzled, to church without her, and then declined to follow with Mr. Brand, who has called expressly to take her. Putting down a volume of

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The Arabian Nights, she goes to the door, and beholds, as it seems to her, 'the Prince Camaralzaman standing before her'. She gives Felix, with a glass of wine, the slice of cake that Charlotte had indicated as a proper refreshment to be offered to Mr. Brand. The *tête-a-tête* with Felix contrasts amusingly and significantly with those in which, earlier in the same chapter, Mr. Brand and, before that, Charlotte was the other party.

The advent of Felix is decisive. Gertrude (who 'had never seen a play in her life') now knows beyond question that she will never marry Mr. Brand; and she can henceforth be fully explicit, at any rate with herself, in associating her refusal of the family prescription for her restlessness with her rejection of the Wentworth moral habit. 'Why do they try and make me feel guilty?' she asks. And, her 'difficult temperament' being in question:

> ' "Why do you call it difficult? It might have been easy, if you had allowed it. You wouldn't let me be natural. I don't know what you wanted to make of me. Mr. Brand was the worst".
>
> Charlotte at last took hold of her sister. She laid her two hands upon Gertrude's arm. "He cares so much for you", she almost whispered.
>
> Gertrude looked at her an instant; then kissed her. "No, he does not", she said'.

Felix Young's quite unbellicose triumph is complete. He not only marries Gertrude and takes her off with him out of the moral climate where she can never thrive. His presence acts as a general solvent of the constrictions and self-deceptions that go with the too habitually braced and anxious conscience. Charlotte is made to feel that, if she constantly watches Mr. Brand, it isn't purely out of concern for his success with Gertrude, and Mr. Brand to feel that it wouldn't be unpleasant to him, or unsuitable, if Charlotte really were (as Felix suggests she is) interested in him on her own account. Owing, in fact, to Felix, Charlotte and Mr. Brand find their happiness in one another.

There is no mystery about Felix Young's representative value: it is given in his name. He stands for the opposite of the puritanic temperament and attitude to life. One must hasten to add that, if his face 'was not at all serious, yet it inspired the liveliest confidence', and rightly; for the happy nature that he expresses with such irresistible spontaneity is also good. 'He was so bright and handsome and talkative that it was impossible not to think well of him; and yet it seemed as if there was something almost impudent, almost vicious—or as if there ought to be—in a young man being at once so joyous and so positive'. This is Mr. Wentworth's point of view. As he registers, Felix, for all his happy vivacity, is no lightweight; he is in fact morally irresistible: 'It is to be observed that while Felix was not at all a serious young man there was somehow more of him—he had more weight and volume and resonance—than a number of young men who were distinctly serious'.—Not being afraid or distrustful of life, and being at the same time very

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intelligent, he has profited by a wide and varied experience: he is mature in valuation, and in understanding of human nature.

I have said that his representative value is plain. That is, there can be no doubt about the qualities he stands for. But there may be some question about the sense in which he may be said to represent Europe. What he bodies forth is an ideal possibility cherished in James's imagination. If, as he says, he is a Bohemian, he is without the Bohemian vices. He shows that there may be a person of radical responsibility who has at the same time all the virtues of the artistic temperament (for that is what his being an artist means—'The world', he says, 'will never hear of me'). 'It is beside the matter to say that he had a good conscience; for the best conscience is a sort of self-reproach, and this young man's brilliantly healthy nature spent itself in objective good intentions which were ignorant of any test save exactness in hitting their mark'.

In justification for making him a European James would no doubt have urged that an American without an experience of Europe couldn't have conceived the possibility. Felix implies a background in which it is not extravagantly original to postulate, and practise, an art of living—implies a mature civilization and a sophisticated social culture. He doesn't, any more than his sister, 'think of life as a discipline'; he is like her, not only disposed to enjoy, but qualified for refinement in enjoying, having cultivated the art. The contrast with the New England ethos is complete:

> 'This was not Mr. Wentworth's way of treating any human occurrence. The sudden irruption into the well-ordered consciousness of the Wentworths of an element not allowed for in its scheme of usual obligations, required a readjustment of that sense of responsibility which constituted its principal furniture. To consider an event, crudely and baldly, in the light of the pleasure it might bring them, was an intellectual exercise with which Felix Young's American cousins were almost wholly unacquainted, and which they scarcely supposed to be largely pursued in any section of human society. The arrival of Felix and his sister was a satisfaction, but it was a singularly joyless and inelastic satisfaction. It was an extension of duty, of the exercise of the more recondite virtues . . . '

The opportunities of comedy presented by the contrast in ethos are decidedly in James's line. He takes them with a master's hand. If one is to instance from so great a wealth, there is the conversation (Chapter VII) between Felix and Mr. Wentworth who, without having given a positive consent—having, in fact, expressed nothing but embarrassed unwillingness—finds himself sitting for his portrait. The talk turns upon the Wentworth son:

> ' "Clifford's situation is no laughing matter", said Mr. Wentworth. "It is very peculiar, as I suppose you have guessed".
> "Ah, you mean his love-affair with his cousin?"

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Mr. Wentworth stared, blushing a little. "I mean his absence from college. He has been suspended. We have decided not to speak of it unless we are asked".

"Suspended?" Felix repeated.

"He has been requested by the Harvard authorities to absent himself for six months. Meanwhile he is studying with Mr. Brand. We think Mr. Brand will help him; at least we hope so".

"What befell him at college?" Felix asked. "He was too fond of pleasure? Mr. Brand certainly will not teach him any of those secrets!"

"He was too fond of something of which he should not have been fond. I suppose it is considered a pleasure".

Felix gave his light laugh. "My dear uncle, is there any doubt about its being a pleasure? *C'est de son âge,* as they say in France".

"I should have said rather it was a vice of later life—of disappointed old age".

Felix glanced at his uncle with lifted eyebrows, and then, "Of what are you speaking?" he demanded, smiling.

"Of the situation in which Clifford was found".

"Ah, he was found—he was caught?"

"Necessarily, he was caught. He couldn't walk; he staggered".

"Oh", said Felix, "he drinks! I rather suspected that, from something I observed the first day I came here. I quite agree with you that it is a low taste. It is not a vice for a gentleman. He ought to give it up" '.

Felix prescribes the influence of a clever and charming woman, and indicates Eugenia:

' "With Clifford", the young man pursued, "Eugenia will simply be enough of a coquette to be a little ironical. That's what he needs. So you recommend him to be nice with her, you know. The suggestion will come best from you".

"Do I understand", asked the old man, "that I am to suggest to my son to make a—a profession of—of affection to Madame Münster?"

"Yes, yes—a profession!" cried Felix sympathetically.

"But, as I understand it, Madame Münster is a married woman".

"Ah", said Felix, smiling, "of course she can't marry him. But she will do what she can".

Mr. Wentworth sat for some time with his eyes on the floor; at last he got up. "I don't think", he said, "that I can undertake to recommend to my son any such course". And without meeting Felix's surprised glance he broke off his sitting, which was not resumed for a fortnight'.

The comedy involves, it will be seen, the difference of manners and social conventions as well as of radical ethos—Felix *is* a

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European. But his sister Eugenia, Baroness Münster, morganatic wife of the younger brother of the reigning prince of Silberstadt-Schreckenstein, is much more positively and representatively Europe. Her name and titles proclaim plainly enough what she stands for: a hierarchical order, and a social system at once feudal and sophisticated, involving the conventions of 'birth', status and precedence, and associating rank and title with power and material advantage. There is a suggestion of a weight of history lying oppressively on an undemocratic present.

The Baroness might be expected to find a lack of sophistication and of form in the social life of New England, and she does. This makes her tribute the more significant. The girls, she admits, are perfect ladies; 'it was impossible to be more of a lady than Charlotte Wentworth, in spite of her little village air'—though ' "as for thinking them the best company in the world", said the Baroness, "that is another thing . . . " ' In the strength of the first impression, before she has had time to be bored, she pays, embodiment of worldliness that she is, an even more significant tribute:

> 'There were tears in her eyes. The luminous interior, the gentle tranquil people, the simple, serious life—the sense of these things pressed upon her with an overmastering force, and she felt herself yielding to one of the most genuine emotions she had ever known. "I should like to stay here", she said. "Pray take me in" '.

And she recognizes, appreciatively, that the unworldliness of the Wentworths ('the Wentworth household seemed to her very perfect of its kind—wonderfully peaceful and unspotted; pervaded by a sort of dove-coloured freshness that had all the quietude and benevolence of what she deemed to be Quakerism') is founded upon a degree of material abundance for which, in certain matters of detail, one might have looked in vain at the little court of Silberstadt-Schreckenstein'. But the most significant tribute of all is the magnitude of her defeat as she feels it—for that is her part in the fable: to suffer, in contrast with her brother, defeat, complete and unambiguous.

She has come to America with a view to making a good marriage (her morganatic status in Silberstadt-Schreckenstein being both unsatisfactory and terminable). She finds someone eminently eligible in a cousin of the Wentworths, Robert Acton, 'the man of the world of the family'. He is, by her standards too, a man of the world, and he has 'quintupled a fortune already considerable'. We are told, significantly, that 'his national consciousness has been complicated by a residence in foreign lands', and that he 'yet disliked to hear Americans abused'. He has a consciousness, then, that is central to the fable, and his valuations have a peculiar authority. He is strongly attracted by the Baroness: 'He was in love with her now', we are in due course told, ' . . . and the only question with him was whether he could trust her'.

His final judgment is adverse, and its significance for us is

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defined with the greatest delicacy and precision. Being Robert Acton's, it is not a New England judgment, and for that reason has its force as an endorsement of New England. There is nothing narrow, provincial or inexperienced about Acton's morality; he still goes on admiring and being attracted after the point at which he can say: 'She is a woman who will lie'. What he admires are the qualities Gertrude also, we are significantly told, admires her for. They are the qualities of the refined social civilization of which she is the representative. Those qualities involve, essentially, a very different code from that voiced with appropriate simplicity by Charlotte: 'There can surely be no good reason for telling an untruth'. For the Baroness things cannot be as simple as that. 'There were several ways of understanding her', we are told—the occasion being something she has said to her brother, concerning which she herself is 'wondering in what manner he really understood her': 'there was what she said, and there was what she meant, and there was something between the two that was neither'. The essential difference between the codes is brought out dramatically when she is detected in an inveracity that is for her simply a piece of normal social behaviour—something she does easily and naturally with a grace that constitutes her charm.

> 'The Baroness turned her smile toward him, and she instantly felt she had been observed to be fibbing. She had struck a false note. But who were these people to whom such fibbing was not pleasing? If they were annoyed, the Baroness was equally so'.

Significantly, it is Robert Acton whom she sees to be judging her here. The fib concerns him and his mother: 'He has talked to me immensely of you'. Where they touch his mother he finds such insincerities indeed displeasing—and the fib is a peculiarly inappropriate one, though the inappropriateness isn't apparent to the Baroness's kind of percipience. Much later in the drama 'he felt a downright need to tell her that he admired her and that she struck him as a very superior woman'. He reflects that 'she had conformed to the angular conditions of New England life, and she had had the tact and pluck to carry it off'.

The 'angularity' predicated here is angularity by the Baroness's criteria—criteria partly endorsed, no doubt, by Robert, 'the man of the world of the family'. But something that is unequivocally to be judged as 'angularity' by us gets a good deal of salience in the fable. We have it in the extreme form of provincial crudity in the scene (Chapter XI) leading up immediately to that of the Baroness's final discomfiture: it is enacted by the two gentlemen who have driven over from Boston in a buggy.

> 'One of them, indeed, said nothing to her; he only sat and watched, with intense gravity, and leaned forward solemnly, presenting his ear (a very large one), as if he were deaf, whenever she dropped an observation. He had evidently been impressed with the idea of her misfortunes and reverses; he never

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smiled. His companion adopted a lighter, easier style; sat as near as possible to Madame Münster; attempted to draw her out, and proposed every few moments a new topic of conversation'.

We have it too, in the same scene, in Clifford Wentworth's exhibition of himself as decidedly not a finished man of the world. The effect is to emphasize the significance of the Baroness's defeat: in spite of the attendant 'angularity', better the New England on which she has failed so utterly to impose herself than the Europe she represents—an upshot endorsed, in his mature decision, by Robert Acton, a qualified judge along the whole scale of values.

But this head of 'angularity' must not be dismissed so simply; it covers some important discriminations that are delicately established for us. We can concur easily in the Baroness's verdict that 'Clifford, really, was crude'. But the 'pretty manners' she is proposing to teach him when she passes it engage her whole European code. And we must keep that positive code well in sight even when James himself may reasonably be taken to be making, dramatically, a critical note about the lack of form and of forms in this American social life. Here we have the Baroness's first appearance at the Wentworths':

> 'They were all standing round his sister, as if they were expecting her to acquit herself of the exhibition of some peculiar faculty, some brilliant talent. Their attitude seemed to imply that she was a kind of conversational mountebank, attired, intellectually, in gauze and spangles. This attitude gave a certain ironical force to Madame Münster's next words. "Now this is your circle", she said to her uncle. "This is your *salon*. These are your regular habitués, eh? I am so glad to see you all together".
>
> "Oh", said Mr. Wentworth, "they are always dropping in and out. You must do the same" '.

This, we may feel, is unmistakably a point scored against 'angularity'. Yet it is significant that the criticism (if we are to take it as such) associates very intimately with that made by the Baroness herself, when she says to Acton: 'in this country, you know, the relations of young people are so extraordinary that one is quite at sea. They are not engaged when you would quite say they ought to be'. And this, we feel, is not something we have to take as simply a point scored against New England. To set against the Baroness's criticism we have the appreciative note with which her brother, registering the same social characteristics, takes stock of the recognition that 'he had never before found himself in contact so unrestricted with young unmarried ladies':

> 'He had known, fortunately, many virtuous gentlewomen, but, it now appeared to him that in his relations with them (especially when they were unmarried), he had been looking at pictures under glass. He perceived at present what a nuisance

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the glass had been—how it perverted and interfered, how it caught the reflexion of other objects and kept you walking from side to side'.

It is here that we have to consider Robert's sister, Lizzie Acton, and her value in the scheme of the fable. The Baroness marks her at the introductory meeting with the family as 'very much more [than the Wentworth daughters] what we have been accustomed to think of as the American type'. And we are told later that the Baroness 'disliked this little American girl': 'Lizzie struck her as positive and explicit almost to pertness; and the idea of combining the apparent incongruities of a taste for housework and the wearing of fresh, Parisian-looking dresses suggested the possession of a dangerous energy'. Such a 'little girl', even if extremely pretty, should have been insignificant, but somehow Lizzie unmistakably isn't. It avails the Baroness nothing to reflect that American girls have no manners; she has to pay Lizzie the tribute of dislike and a strong sense of irritation. The ground is, 'not an aspiration on the girl's part to rivalry, but a kind of laughing, childishly-mocking indifference to the results of comparison'. This is what the Baroness cannot forgive. It insinuates doubt into the 'feeling of almost illimitable power' given her by 'the sense . . . that the good people about her had, as regards her remarkable self, no standard of comparison at all'. And in fact it is to be the irony of her defeat that she should have to see this as a matter of the helplessness of her advantages in the face of people who, having 'no standard', fail to recognize them:

> 'If she could have done something at the moment, on the spot, she would have stepped upon a European steamer and turned her back, with a kind of rapture, upon that profoundly mortifying failure, her visit to her American relations. It is not exactly apparent why she should have termed this enterprise a failure, inasmuch as she had been treated with the highest distinction for which allowance had been made in American institutions. Her irritation came, at bottom, from the sense, which, always present, had suddenly grown acute, that the social soil on this big, vague continent was somehow not adapted for growing those plants whose fragrance she especially inclined to inhale, and by which she liked to see herself surrounded—a species of vegetation for which she carried a collection of seedlings, as we may say, in her pocket. She found her chief happiness in the sense of exerting a certain power and making a certain impression and now she felt the annoyance of a rather wearied swimmer who, on nearing shore to land, finds a smooth straight wall of rock when he had counted upon a clean firm beach. Her power, in the American air, seemed to have lost its prehensile attributes; the smooth wall of rock was insurmountable'.

That is the account Madame Münster gives herself. But it is not for nothing that her sense of utter defeat, at the bitterest moment,

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should be focussed upon Lizzie Acton, who, for us, represents something quite other than any mere lack, limitation or barrenness in America. In the scene of Madame Münster's final discomfiture, when she already knows that Robert Acton has decided against her, the cruellest blow comes when she is told, to her utter surprise, that Clifford is to marry Lizzie—Clifford whom, acting on the principle that 'a prudent archer has always a second bowstring', she had been, with confident and complacent unawareness, favouring with her charm. This disconcerting shock is what the formlessness of New England manners had been preparing for her.

'Formlessness', quite clearly, is not to be our own summing-up. Lizzie Acton belongs to this society, and there is a good deal else about it too that, reflecting on our response to James's art, we find ourselves recognizing for positive valuation. The 'formlessness' beyond question comprises some angularity, but, in sum, it affects us as an admirable naturalness. We see that James largely approves of the social order that enables young men and girls to mix with such innocent freedom—for it *is*, for all its informality, an order, embodying a number of positive values: he associates freedom with a habit of sincerity and mutual respect in personal relations though he notes also a timidly helpless lack of responsibility towards the young on the part of the senior world.

But perhaps it would be better not to refer, in this way, to James himself. When we elicit judgments and valuations from the fable—which is perfectly dramatic and perfectly a work of art—we don't think of them as coming from the author. It is a drawback of the present kind of commentary that it tends in some ways to slight this quality of art, this creative perfection; it doesn't suggest the concrete richness and self-sufficiency of the drama, or the poetic subtlety of the means by which the discriminations are established. No instancing can convey the variety and flexibility of these means; one illustration must suffice to suggest the delicacy and precision that characterize them everywhere. The Wentworths, after the Baroness's introductory call, are discussing how she is to be accommodated:

> ' "She will be very comfortable here", said Charlotte, with something of a housewife's pride. "She can have the large north-east room. And the French bedstead", Charlotte added, with a constant sense of the lady's foreignness.
>
> "She will not like it", said Gertrude, "not even if you pin little tidies all over the chairs".
>
> "Why not, dear?" asked Charlotte, perceiving a touch of irony here, but not resenting it.
>
> Gertrude had left her chair; she was walking about the room; her stiff silk dress, which she had put on in honour of the Baroness, made a sound upon the carpet. "I don't know", she replied. "She will want something more—more private".
>
> "If she wants to be private she can stay in her room", Lizzie Acton remarked.
>
> Gertrude paused in her walk, looking at her. "That would

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not be pleasant'', she answered. ''She wants privacy and pleasure together''.

Robert Acton began to laugh again. ''My dear cousin, what a picture!''

Charlotte had fixed her serious eyes upon her sister; she wondered whence she had suddenly derived these strange notions. Mr. Wentworth also observed his younger daughter.

''I don't know what her manner of life may have been'', he said; ''but she certainly never can have enjoyed a more refined and salubrious home''.

Gertrude stood there looking at them all. ''She is the wife of a Prince'', she said.

''We are all princes here'', said Mr. Wentworth; ''and I don't know of any palace in this neighbourhood that is to let'' '.

What we have to notice here is how the attitude towards Mr. Wentworth shifts as we pass from his first observation to his retort, and in shifting makes one of James's essential discriminations. Both utterances have a distinctively American note. The earlier one illustrates James's debt to the Dickens of *Martin Chuzzlewit*. When a wooden house 'eighty years old' is thus exalted we can't mistake the intention; we know that we are to feel an ironical amusement at a characteristic American complacency characteristically expressed, and that the nicely chosen adjectives, 'refined' and salubrious', register a critical irony induced in the observer by certain elements of the native ethos, the speaker being unironically solemn. But the retort is quite another matter: it exemplifies a characteristic American humour that reminds us of Mark Twain—the critical irony has changed direction. We perceive that Mr. Wentworth at this point has his creator's backing, and, opposed as he is here to the Baroness, stands for an American democracy that James offers with conviction (his art tells us—and it is that alone we are reporting on) as an American superiority. James's right to count on a responsiveness that will qualify the reader to take such signals duly has been established by the sensitive precision, the closeness of organization combined with flexibility, of the art everywhere.

The 'democracy' that James endorses gets its definition in the whole dramatic poem. He may be said to be engaged in defining it when he is dealing, in the ways discussed above, with the aspects of New England society that strike the Baroness as provincial crudity and formlessness; for what he approves of in the manners and social habits of the Wentworths and Actons clearly belongs to the spirit of 'We are all princes here'. With this spirit he would like to associate (and the association is effected by his art) the Wentworth virtues of sincerity and moral refinement—virtues ideally, his art implies, separable from the restrictive aspects of Puritanism. And he also values very highly, among the qualities that go with the Puritan heritage, that steady underlying seriousness which is defined by contrast when the Baroness, in her last interview with Mrs. Acton, shrinks from the matter-of-factness

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with which that old gentlewoman refers to her own imminent end ('The Baroness hated to be reminded of death'). This seriousness, it is implied, has its essential part in the ethos of the ideal civilization.

The respects in which, for all its indispensable virtues, James finds New England lacking are suggested by the symbolic parlour into which Felix, calling for the first time, is led by Gertrude: it is 'a high, clean, rather empty-looking room'. (Imagery of this poetic kind, arising with inevitable naturalness in the presentment of the drama, plays a great part in the definition of theme and attitude). The Baroness, accommodated by Mr. Wentworth with a smaller house across the way for her own occupation, tries to relieve the emptiness—'the little white house was pitifully bare'—by disposing shawls and other draperies (she 'had brought with her to the New World a copious provision of costumes') over the chairs and sofas and mantel-shelves and by hanging curtains: the symbolism needs no explaining. But even the Baroness herself, as she gets ready to depart, sees them as vulgar irrelevancies: '*Bonté divine*, what rubbish! I feel like a strolling actress; these are my properties'.

It is not the Baroness, but her brother Felix, who represents the important things for lack of which James's New England has to figure as 'rather empty-looking'. And this is the point at which to complete with a corrective addition the account given earlier of his significance as an artist. It is true that he is not a Roderick Hudson; he is not Creative Genius—he stands for an attitude towards life and for the un-Puritanic 'Bohemian' virtues. But he stands too for a conception of art and of its function in a civilized community—that function of which the Wentworths (Gertrude had never seen a play) are so sadly unaware. *The Europeans*, in fact, is closely related in theme and pre-occupation to the novel called after Roderick Hudson—James's first, which, as I have suggested earlier in these pages, is less essentially a study of creative genius than its title implies.

What this account of *The Europeans* hasn't suggested is the extraordinarily dramatic quality of the book. I use the word 'dramatic' here in its most obvious sense: *The Europeans* could be very readily adapted for performance. The dialogue—and the action never departs far from dialogue—is all admirable 'theatre', and the whole is done in scenes and situations that seem asking to be staged. The whole, too, in its astonishing economy, is managed with the art of a master dramatist. That culminating twelfth chapter, in which the various constituents of the comedy of personal relations are brought together in a *dénouement*, rivals the admired and comparable things of Shakespeare and Molière.

In the theatre, of course, a large part of the subtler and essential imagery and symbolism by means of which the profounder pre-occupations are engaged would be lost. All the same, much of the symbolism is obvious enough in its naturalness and felicity. To the instances already mentioned I will add that of the three houses: the Wentworths', the Actons' and that occupied by the Baroness, each expressing its occupants. The Baroness's is embellished with

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her 'curtains, cushions and gimcracks', and has the studio improvised by Felix attached. The Actons' differs from the Wentworths' in being just such a one as the Baroness would have liked to possess: it is the appropriate dwelling of a cultivated and wealthy man who knows the larger world and who—a point for the reader's appreciation if not for the Baroness's—has yet decided to remain an American.

Rich as *The Europeans* is in symbolic and poetic interest, deep and close as is its organization as fable and dramatic poem, it can still be read straightforwardly as novel of manners and social comedy. This may help to explain why its distinction has escaped notice. Jane Austen's novels are known as novels of manners, and, high as her conventional reputation stands, the qualities that make her a great artist have commonly been ignored. Her name comes up naturally and properly here. For in *The Europeans* it is pretty clearly from Jane Austen that James descends; what he offers is a development in the line of *Emma* and *Persuasion*.

F. R. LEAVIS.

CORRESPONDENCE

Gentlemen,

I am most reluctant to trespass again on your valuable space, but the last paragraph of Mr. Davies' letter calls for a further explanation.

The title poem of the *Farewell and Welcome* volume contains a number of fossils from other poems published and unpublished. Lines 17-21 of *Fulfilment is not in Waiting* were written in 1939; certain lines of *Distance has Magic* appeared in a poem written in the autumn of 1939 and published in *Seven* some time in 1940; lines 1-10 of *Freedom lies in Acceptance* were written in the autumn of 1941. The whole section *Distance has Magic* was finished in its final form in the spring of 1941; I believe that Dr. Leavis received a copy of it in the summer of 1941[1] and it was published in the Swedish periodical *Ars* in 1941.

I have preferred to regard *Farewell and Welcome* as a single poem in five sections (the sub-title, 'A sequence of poems', given in *Scrutiny* for Summer 1942 was not authorized by me), and as the whole poem was not finished until June-July 1942, I thought it unnecessary to clutter up a short prefatory note with the details given above.

The *Scrutiny* version of the poem was slightly altered in the 1945 edition and again in *Selected Poems*.

Yours faithfully,

RONALD BOTTRALL.

PALAZZO BORGHESE, ROME.
3rd June, 1948.

[1] I have no record, so cannot volunteer corroboration.—F.R.L.

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COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

A NOTE ON INTELLECTUAL LIFE IN THE U.S.A.

The peculiarly exposed position, culturally speaking, of America gives an added interest to any news of intellectual life there. Most European reporters, however, concentrate on the 'machine' aspects of American civilization and are chiefly concerned to bring out contrasts with conditions in Europe. We are consequently singularly ill-informed about what corresponds in New York, say, to the literary world (in the more respectable sense) of London or Paris. This is a reason for welcoming what Mlle. Simone de Beauvoir has to say (in *Les Temps Modernes*, December, 1947) about her visit to the U.S.A. in 1947. She went to New York from Paris (where she is a prominent figure in literary circles) eager, in spite of her imperfect command of the language, to make contacts with her 'opposite numbers' in New York.

The editor of a left-wing review told her with a smile that there was nothing worth seeing in New York, no good films, no good books. Apart from Faulkner, there were no living novelists worth reading. He advised her to study the 'classics' of the American tradition and expressed irritation at the French enthusiasm over third-rate sensational American writers. Mlle. de Beauvoir had ample opportunity to confirm that this attitude to literature was not an isolated reaction. She was later invited to a literary party where among the crowds who attended and the abundance of drinks ('encore plus d'alcool que de gens') she was introduced to someone described to her as the most intelligent man in America. She found herself surrounded by a group of writers belonging to yet another advanced left-wing review who (perhaps under the influence of the cocktails) spoke to her in an aggressive tone apparently quite unknown in Parisian literary circles. Their opinions about the relative value of contemporary American novelists were in substance those of the editor of the other review. Some of the heat of the discussion was generated by political differences. These writers, she reports, hated Stalinism with a passion known only to those who had once been Stalinists themselves.

Their chief complaint was of the hard lot of the American intellectual. Their review had a circulation of ten thousand, but what was that in comparison with the millions of the total population? Their feeling of isolation as a group was intensified by the lack of friendships among fellow-writers. Mlle. de Beauvoir's informants further explained that it was extremely difficult to make an honest living as a writer. That conditions are likely to grow worse is one of the conclusions that may be drawn from a *New Directions* pamphlet, *The Fate of Writing in America*, by J. T.

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Farrell, who describes the recent changes that have occurred in the American publishing world.

> 'The war boom demonstrated positively that mass production and distribution in books are both feasible and highly profitable. These developments are irreversible. Their structural consequences are revealed in the tendency toward combination and centralization. Inevitably every phase of book business will become more concentrated than in the past. This concentration will increase the difficulties of operation for small and independent publishers, and it will probably have the effect of requiring a higher initial investment from any newcomers into the field. In other words, the scale of publishing will be enlarged, and money will talk more than ever. It is already common knowledge that books which have the largest advertising budgets most frequently receive prompt and long reviews, and that those selected by a large book club are generally treated as important books by the majority of reviewers. The immediate, if not the permanent reputations of many writers are related to such factors'. Farrell predicts that 'the area of literary freedom will become narrowed, bottle-necked. The serious writer will be pressed into his bohemia, that cultural ghetto of bourgeois society'. (Will be pressed, that is, if he remains passive. Mr. Farrell does not think the writer's case hopeless).

Mlle. de Beauvoir noted that most American writers belong to what amounts to a different class from that of the intellectuals. Hostility between these 'classes' is apparently acute. She reports a collective judgment from the writers' camp on the contributors to the review mentioned above. 'They hate all living writers because they themselves are not alive and cannot write. They need idols to worship because they have no inner resources. First they had Stalin, then it was Trotsky—now they have the American Tradition'.

Mlle. de Beauvoir does not name the review in question and no innuendo is intended here in passing on to the examination of *Partisan Review*, which has now been published here in a 'British' edition for more than a year by *Horizon* in collaboration with Percy Lund Humphries & Co., Ltd. The publisher's announcement describes the review as the most intellectual magazine in America and the most lively, and states that Edmund Wilson recently spoke of it as 'the only first-rate literary magazine now published in the United States'. It appeared regularly as a bi-monthly in 1947.

To judge by the six numbers which appeared in that year, the contributing 'intellectuals' are mostly university teachers or journalists, and although the review is published in New York, the writers are drawn from all parts of America. *PR* No. 5 contains an article by a Mr. Wolfert entitled 'Notes on the American Intelligentsia' in which the true intellectuals are described as belonging to the group which includes 'members of the faculties of the universities and the few writers in the large cities who do independent critical work pitched beyond the level of commercial-

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ism'—the group who conceive of their rôle as a devotion to a calling as distinct from 'the journalists of the large city dailies and the writers for the organs of public opinion on a mass scale such as the Luce publications'. A third group is formed by 'the acolytes of Stalinism such as the contributors to the *New Masses*, also the writers on the staff of *PM* and the facile popularizers who disseminate the orthodox views of the party, sugar-pilled for mass consumption'. Within the first group, says Mr. Wolfert, the position of the scholars who maintain their devotion to their calling 'is that of marginal men'. The 'bohemians' in this group include 'commentators on the arts as well as critics of literature and social critics who write from a broader humanistic standpoint'. They, too, are marginal men. Mr. Wolfert lists some of the dangers to which they are subject. Firstly, there is the ever-present temptation to give in to the world by prostituting their talents. Or if they remain loyal, there is an equal danger of succumbing to literary fashions and the snob worship of mediocre talents. The 'bohemian intellectual', he thinks, is most likely to suffer from the lack of stable values and be the first to be taken in by the spurious and the bizarre. 'While the academy is to some extent still in possession of certain standards of criticism drawn from tradition and acquaintance with scientific procedures, the bohemians are in the very nature of their social role deprived of intellectual stability. The defect of their virtue is to be receptive to charlatanism which has the aura of creative originality; all too often they admire the grotesque and the startling regardless of its meaning and content. Thus in the little magazines one finds genuinely valid material together with a mass of indigestible jargon. This stuff is often concocted by people who live on the fringes of the avant-garde and who assimilate the mannerisms of this group for reasons other than a concern with ideas or values—reasons that they themselves are not aware of. They are the parasites of intellectualism, who believe themselves to be possessed of originality and critical acumen merely because they consider themselves to be 'different'; their work is no more than a product of their social and psychological maladjustment—a maladjustment not strained through any objectifying process. An inverted snobbishness compensates for their alienation from philistine norms and their bohemian existence protects them from social pulverization. Actually they are brothers under the skin of their philistine counterparts'.

It may be making too much of too little evidence to suppose that 'Bohemia' as described by Mr. Wolfert is the *ambiance* against which *PR* has to struggle hardest. The struggle may be said to be successful—for if the contributors are too slavish in taking up merely fashionable themes, themes dictated presumably by others, they take them up in a critical spirit and generally to drop them as not being worthy of further notice. But if the contributors are intellectuals of Mr. Wolfert's first group, what of the readers? The only hint I could gather was from a series of advertisements well

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calculated to catch a certain level of sophistication, and if so, a document of sociological interest:

> 'A girl whom we know only slightly said to us recently, "I've read the standard authors; what can you recommend next?"
>
> "What do you mean by standard authors?" we asked.
>
> "Oh, you know", she answered, "Miller . . . Patchen . . ."
>
> Although we carry all the current and a few out-of-print titles of both Miller and Patchen, we feel that the young lady carries specialisation a little too far . . . we try to have on hand at all times a representative selection of the creative and critical work of those authors, ancient and modern, foreign and domestic, who have won a place in the library of the serious, sophisticated reader. Auden or Villon, Henry James or James Joyce, if the guy has talent his books are on our shelves'.

Here is another example of the same bookseller's advertisements:

> 'For a few months last year, "everyone" was reading Fitzgerald. And then they were reading James. And then Kafka. And then Kierkegaard and the Existentialists. While James rode the crest of the wave, his books were to be found at the corner cigar-store, but if you read James before it was the thing to do—or want to read him now—this may be your shop'.

PR seems also to have more serious, if not more sophisticated readers than those appealed to in the advertisements, to judge from a spontaneous tribute in the same number. The writer, described in a previous number as a student at Columbia, deposes:

> 'How much this sense of freedom and radical temper in *PR* has meant to me cannot be over-stated, and I consider it a solemn occasion to be able to say as much. As we go into what promises to be at any rate a grim if not catastrophic period, the preservation of an American intellectual community is the highest goal, perhaps, that a magazine can set itself. I don't see how community can be preserved on any level than that set by *PR*. Our universities are not intellectual communities in any real sense. They are groups of virtuosi gathered together largely for self-protection, giving their relatively meaningless solo performances according to certain comfortable conventions . . . Our small college *Reviews* occasionally run *PR* a close second, but one wonders what might happen if they lacked the example of radical independent *Reviews*. The pretence of editorial impartiality is no more successful on the level of the Reviews than on the *Time-Life* level. The Luce papers are partial to all kinds of nationalist arrogance, moral stupidity, and pea-green sophomoric wit; *PR* is partial to vitality, elegance, honesty, etc., etc.—there's the difference, and there is no conceivable compromise. No art or craft can afford a democracy of standards—only a democracy of technical means. Perhaps this is all gross platitude, but it is something I wanted to say'.

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The considerations raised in this letter would serve, if nothing else, to direct attention to the fundamental similarity of the plight of the intellectual in the U.S.A. and in England. Mr. Wolfert described his intellectuals as an 'élite proletariat'. Without wishing to make too much of the analogy, there does seem to be ground for desiderating among these proletarian groups, if not world-wide, at least civilization-wide unity. *PR* already has its contacts with Europe and within Europe with England through Mr. Koestler's 'London Letter'. Now that a 'British' edition is available we have every reason to welcome a review which, besides keeping us informed about intellectual life in the U.S.A., in the state of abnormal poverty from which we suffer as regards literary journals, sets a standard well above the *Horizon* level.

H.A.M.

BACKGROUND AND DOCTRINE

FIVE POEMS 1470-1870, An Elementary Essay on the Background of English Literature, by E. M. W. Tillyard (Chatto and Windus, 8/6).

ESSAYS ON LITERARY CRITICISM AND THE ENGLISH TRADITION, by S. L. Bethell (Dennis Dobson, 6/-).

Both these books are written for the general reader rather than the specialist. The Master of Jesus is concerned primarily with intellectual climate, and offers his work as a new approach to literary history. Mr. Bethell, acknowledging a debt to the criticism of *Scrutiny*, sets out to correct its aberrations and to show the need for the critic to appeal to explicit theological principles.

Dr. Tillyard calls his book 'an elementary essay', but it is not quite so unpretentious as it sounds. His general statement of aims is admirable: as 'an experimental attempt to present some of the contents of histories of literature in an abbreviated form' it is proposed to deal with 'a few pregnant instances, in the hope that general notions may tell more strongly when reached through the particular, and that the changes of temper or doctrine observable from one instance to another may suggest a continuous development. There is warrant for this method in Santayana's *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*'. (There is, certainly, and also in a good deal of criticism since: was it necessary to look back so far?) The method is: first, to explain difficulties and correct misleading interpretations, then to speak of the literary value of the poems, 'for it is first (and perhaps only) through that value that the reader naturally desires to know something of the ideas they take for granted or strive to express', and finally to expound the ideas themselves. This seems a reasonable approach, though it suggests somewhat too categorical a division and does not emphasize

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sufficiently that the 'ideas' only become alive and intelligible, are in fact only effectively there at all, in so far as they are essentially embodied in the poetry. But it is the application of these principles that matters. In the first place the choice of poems seems, if not arbitrary and eccentric, at least to have more regard to their representative character than to their intrinsic value. They are Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*, Davies's *Orchestra*, Dryden's *Ode on Anne Killigrew*, Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* and Swinburne's *Hertha*. The Henryson and the Coleridge may pass as satisfying both conditions: the Davies and the Dryden seem to me only moderately interesting in themselves, and the Swinburne a crude and boring piece of rhetoric.

Even where one agrees with Dr. Tillyard's estimate, however, his critical analysis is sometimes dubious and ineffectual. He tends to use terms like 'rhetoric' and 'structure', 'form' and 'content' as if they referred to separable and measurable constituents, and when he turns to the discussion of less ponderable matters like rhythm and imagery he is often unconvincing. In stanza 14 of the *Testament*, for example, do the words

> Richt privelie, but fellowschip, on fute,
> Disagysit,

really recall in any significant way Milton's

> Eyeless in Gaza at the Mill with slaves?

And surely there is some exaggeration in the following comment on the admittedly effective line

> Under smyling scho was dissimulait:

'The rhythm of the first two words is bolstered up, suggesting the carefully maintained façade: in the last three words the rhythm collapses and disperses, suggesting both the secretiveness of a whisper and the shifts and eddies behind the façade'. Or again on stanza 106 of *Orchestra* Dr. Tillyard comments 'The very iteration of *Love* is like the beat of a young, full-blooded pulse', but is the effect really more than that of a conventional repetition which could be paralleled in at least a score of other Elizabethan poems? Or take his justification of the image of the sea's 'great crystal eye' in stanza 49 as 'more than fancy': 'The shape of both is curved; both offer surfaces for reflected light; both have their little-known and important depths beneath those surfaces'. One is tempted to add 'and there is salmons in both', but the point is that these ingenious comparisons are not operative in a normal reading of the line and the image remains a fairly superficial conceit. There follows a little dig at the Metaphysicals, but a Metaphysical would hardly have made the sea an eye in one line and the possessor of the eye three lines later.

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Dr. Tillyard is inclined to hedge over his judgments of comparative value. He says 'I do not mean to imply that *Orchestra* is a great poem. In intensity of feeling it falls short of the *Testament of Cresseid* and is closer to the third poem, Dryden's *Ode on Mrs. Killigrew*'. Later we are told 'Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* is a beautiful and moving poem of one good minor poet; Davies's *Orchestra* is a beautiful and exhilarating poem of another. Dryden's *Ode on Anne Killigrew* is a masterpiece of a major poet. We need not like it best, but if we do compare, it makes the other two look a little amateurish'. This rather exaggerated praise of the Ode continues in terms of 'the wealth of imaginative invention' and 'the glory of the verbal music': we hear of the controlled yet enthusiastic movement', 'the masterly formal and logical shape', and so on, but in the end we are hardly persuaded that the poem is equal in complexity or profundity to the *Elegy on an Unfortunate Lady* (to take an example which will leave no excuse for suspecting a dislike of Augustan decorum). The analysis of *The Ancient Mariner* is on the whole more convincing, with a good note on the anticipatory relaxation of rhythm in 'The moving moon went up the sky', some twenty lines before the turning-point of the Mariner's punishment when he blesses the water-snakes unaware. One cannot say the same of the praise of *Hertha*—'eminent for the energy of metrical movement and the fecundity of rhyme. These together express a fine mental exuberance and confidence'. Do they also, one might ask, in W. S. Gilbert? Swinburne's rhythms are hardly subtler. *Hertha*, we are told, 'is poetry that has the simple function of rousing the blood: and as such it is not to be despised'. But for such simple functions there are 'brisker pipes than poetry' and anyway Swinburne himself can be far livelier than here. Dr. Tillyard finally classes *Hertha* with Santayana's 'poetry of barbarism', but he persists in offering it as 'a splendid poem'.

I have dwelt particularly on the critical sections because Dr. Tillyard professes to put criticism first and it seems to me that he has not lived up to his professions. He appears, in fact, to be perpetuating the errors of the histories of literature in confusing historical with intrinsic significance. It is easy to see how for the literary historian a poem's suitability as an illustration of current ideas can become a substitute for genuine poetic value: similarly a preoccupation with the background of thought on the part of the student may easily take the place of a sensitive response to the work itself. No sensible person will wish to deny the need for some knowledge of a poem's cultural and historical setting, but sensitiveness to literary value comes first, and by this one does not mean what the blurb in a revealing phrase calls 'the technical point of view of pure literary criticism'. After all, the cultural and historical background was not exactly ignored in such books as *The Sacred Wood* and *Revaluation*, and a good many articles in this journal have shown how criticism necessarily leads on to other considerations not limited to ideas and *intellectual* assumptions.

In the sections dealing more directly with 'mental climate'

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Dr. Tillyard seems more at home and the result is a series of notes in the manner of his *Elizabethan World Picture*: the chapters on Henryson and Davies naturally cover some of the same ground. The Dryden chapter has a few useful comments on decorum and the Restoration world picture, but doubts are raised when we are invited to see the 'heroic principle' in Mirabel and Millamant, 'great characters sharply distinguished from the smaller folk that surround them'. The accounts of *The Ancient Mariner* and *Hertha* bring out some relevant trends of contemporary thought, though the classification of different attitudes becomes at times rather pedantic and laboured. From all of these sections a student might derive profitable knowledge and it is perhaps unfair to complain that rather too much fuss is made about comparatively obvious matters. If, however, the reader in mind really needs this kind of commentary, is he at a stage to be bothered with poems like *Orchestra* and the *Killigrew* ode, let alone *Hertha*? He can only feel the significance of the cultural assumptions of the past as something more than dead 'systems of ideas' if he first meets them functioning vitally in works of art that are unquestionably alive for us to-day.

The five parallel illustrations from the visual arts are open to much the same objections as some of the poems, namely that they are not in themselves sufficiently interesting. The resemblance of the *Troy Book* illumination to the *Testament* in serenity seems very slight, and a friend has suggested to me that the Grinling Gibbons chimney-piece might go more appropriately with Thomson's *Seasons*.

Mr. Bethell's book is a collection of essays from *The New English Weekly*, but that seems hardly to account for so pontifical a style, which at times also parodies itself: 'On the twenty-third Sunday after Trinity, being the eve of Powder Plot Day, Mr. Charles Morgan read himself in as critic to the *Sunday Times* . . . ' or his hearty assertions of ignorance ('I have never yet brought myself to read Flaubert'). His main theme is the necessity for literary criticism to be completed by explicit theological beliefs, and he is no more convincing here than in *The Literary Outlook*. Since he is engaged on several fronts simultaneously and argues throughout at a rather elementary level, it is difficult to follow all the turns of his thought. His most plausible point seems to be that since all criticism will show the influence of the critic's personal beliefs it is better for these to be explicit rather than unconscious. But surely this amounts to little more than the platitude that it is as well for the critic to be clear in his own mind about his beliefs? He is not bound to obtrude them in his work, nor is he absolved from conscious effort towards critical disinterestedness. However impossible it may be theoretically to see the work of art 'in itself', two critics can reach a considerable measure of agreement as to what lies in front of them before ultimate philosophical differences come into the question at all. Perhaps the real point at issue between Mr. Bethell and the *Scrutiny* critics to whom he so frequently refers is that (like the Marxists) he rejects the possibility of that working

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measure of agreement about values which is implied in a living tradition, that cultural continuity which Dr. Leavis[1] has called preserving for the race 'the ability to draw on its most significant experience'. In the article from which this phrase is taken the critical discipline is defined in terms of 'a trained and cultivated ability to be relevant'. Mr. Bethell himself asserts that the duty of the critic is to find out what is 'really there, perhaps well below the surface'. But in practice the expositors of overt beliefs, whether Marxist or Anglican, are not at all notable for stricter relevance or a greater ability to guard against distortion by 'personal predilections or the assumptions of [their] own social group' (p. 13). Does Mr. Bethell really think that it is anti-religious prejudice which refuses to countenance his estimate of Charlotte Yonge or his coupling of Mr. Nicholson's *Five Rivers* with Mr. Eliot's *Little Gidding*? Is it not, in fact, rather arrogant of him to assume that all Christians would share his views?

His critical practice is an extraordinary mixture. He shows some grasp of what he sometimes misleadingly calls 'textual' criticism and can deal adequately with a passage of *Macbeth*: in the chapter on Levels of Abstraction he says one or two sensible things about the eighteenth century and its relatively mechanical view of composition. One or two of his incidental criticisms of *Scrutiny* are fair comment and at least deserve consideration. But for the most part the later sections of the book are simply an ingenious attempt to re-establish a safe academic eclecticism ('catholicity') of taste. The chapter on narrative, starting from the commonplace that the method of fiction is cumulative and that a novel can afford to carry dull passages, proceeds to the extreme position that a novelist's style is more or less irrelevant: 'the prose may remain over-abstract and perhaps clumsy, yet there may be great penetration in the treatment of character, incident and thought . . . Most novelists, I suppose, are merely undistinguished in style . . . it is essentially the style in common literary use that they employ. Smollett, Scott, Trollope, would all come under this head; so would Charlotte M. Yonge'. So, one might add, would *not* Jane Austen, Emily Brönte, George Eliot, Henry James and Conrad, to extend the list no further. One is grateful for so bald a statement of the assumptions behind most academic criticism of fiction. 'The consideration of plot, character and thought' is the critic's main task, but, Mr. Bethell concludes 'I need discuss it no further, since critical methods at that level are well known and their results generally appreciated'.

The chapter on Two Streams from Helicon is an irritating muddle of misconceptions and half-truths. The streams are: Group A, Donne, Shakespeare, Hopkins, etc., Group B, Spenser, Milton, Tennyson, etc. *Scrutiny* critics want all poetry to be like Group A and praise Group B poets only for incidental A qualities.

[1]In a relevant note on *Literary Criticism and Politics* published in *Politics and Letters*, December, 1947.

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So gross an over-simplification would be hardly worth discussing if it were not unfortunately a common misunderstanding. To answer the argument point by point would be tedious, but it seems appropriate to make one or two general statements. (1) The assertion that the language of poetry must bear a significant relation to contemporary speech does not mean that it must always be merely colloquial or that one is committed to any simple Wordsworthian doctrine. At the same time a stylized diction must have cultural sanctions and cannot be taken over as a mere convention by a new age: 'every development of language is a development of feeling as well'. (2) There is no virtue in either regularity or irregularity of rhythm in itself: the point is that it should be functional and expressive. Leaving Shakespeare and Donne out of the question, consider the comments in *Revaluation* on the Mulciber and Enna passages of *Paradise Lost*, on *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, on the *Ode to Autumn*, and in a recent *Scrutiny* on *Westminster Bridge*.[2] (3) Similar considerations apply to imagery: to ask that it shall be functional rather than merely decorative, concrete and immediate rather than vaguely pictorial and glamorous, is by no means to demand that all poetry should be Metaphysical. Keats or Wordsworth will again supply sufficient contrast to Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites. (4) The question of a supposed preference for sophistication and wit (related to nineteen-twenty-ish fashions) goes back not only to Mr. Eliot's essay on Marvell ('a recognition, implicit in every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible') but also to the remark in *Principles of Literary Criticism* that irony is a constant character of the greatest poetry. Mr. Bethell might ponder the fact that of Dr. Richards's five examples two only were Metaphysical, the others being *The Ode to A Nightingale*, *Proud Maisie* and *Sir Patrick Spens*.

As for his attempt to argue that *Tears, idle tears* is superior to *Piano*, it is not convincing; but in its context this comparison was preceded by two others (*Proud Maisie* with *Heraclitus*, and *A slumber did my spirit seal* with *Break, break, break*) which make a similar point in a way even more difficult to refute. Behind all this, of course, lie the hoary old academic prejudices in favour of nineteenth-century romanticism, clothed in the faint aura of theological orthodoxy thrown over them recently by Dr. C. S. Lewis, with his customary ingenuity. Perhaps one should invoke Dante and Mr. Eliot's distinction between the high and the low dream.[3] After all this it is not surprising to find Mr. Bethell concluding with a highly respectable note on the English tradition ('sentimental, romantic, rural') which parades all the right names. We may yet see him, too, 'reading himself in' for one of the Sunday papers on the eve of some future Powder Plot Day.

R. G. Cox.

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[2]F. R. Leavis: *Imagery and Movement*, Vol. XIII, p. 127.
[3]T. S. Eliot: *Selected Essays*, p. 248.

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REASON AND UNREASON IN SOCIETY: *Ginsberg* (*Longmans*, 15/-).

This is a book of considerable importance; and the off-hand way in which it has been received by sections of the press is a matter for some disquiet. It is not difficult to see reasons for its indifferent reception. Neither in style nor subject-matter does Professor Ginsberg pander to the W.E.A.-Pelican level of public discussion; and those who, attracted by its title, go to the book for a rehash of current theories of the irrational, with titillating examples, will be repulsed by an austerity of material and treatment.

Professor Ginsberg is the direct heir to the Hobhouse tradition of sociological thought (he 'knows my mind as well as I know it myself', wrote Hobhouse on one occasion), and he was for many years associated with the first holder of the Martin White professorship, a chair he now occupies himself. Certain features of Hobhouse's system of ideas he accepts as presuppositions to his own approach. Hobhouse asserted a rationalism which sought to extend its sway over the unconscious elements of the mind and which, while it could never become co-extensive with mind, yet accepted such an extension as the ideal to be sought; as he expressed it, 'the weakness or defect of reason is equally the weakness or defect of the non-rational elements. Its extension to them, their inclusion within its sphere, is their redemption'. Hobhouse believed that such an extension of the powers of reason had taken place that man had reached a stage where self-directed development was possible; for to him progress was not automatic, but depended on human will and thought. In Hobhouse's system, too, there was to be a constant interconnection between sociology and social philosophy; there must be a constant 'experiential reconstruction', by which concepts might be referred back to the facts of experience and criticized in the light of a growing knowledge of the conditions determining the development of thought itself. Ultimate questions thus were subject to rational examination—there was to be an interweaving of the mechanical and the teleological. 'Thus the belief in the reality of progress rests ultimately on the rationality of mind, on the possibility of forming an intelligible conception of a good common to humanity, and of securing an effective will directed to this good'.

This brief and by no means full account of Hobhouse's contribution to philosophy and sociology, taken, as it is, largely from Professor Ginsberg's analysis, can be parallelled in the explicit or implicit assumptions of Ginsberg's own positive outlook. What gives his work its peculiar importance at the moment lies in its realization of the need for a connection between social science and social philosophy. 'The problems of deepest interest to laymen and student alike are just those in which questions of value and questions of fact are closely interwoven and to see them in their proper relationship is a matter of the most vital importance to the social inquirer' (p. 122). Professor Ginsberg combats the conclusions 'that moral

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judgments do not permit of rational analysis but are matters of taste or feeling about which there can be no argument, or that value judgments merely express the needs of the dominant sections within any given community' (p. 123). The moral judgment, indeed, he deems to be as susceptible as any other to investigation by rational methods; and though sociology, for instance, should be kept distinct from ethics, 'they should also be brought into definite relation' (p. 128). In an important paper on 'The Function of Reason in Morals', these principles are illustrated in actual analyses of the work of Russell and Durkheim, who are taken to represent the psychological and the sociological criticism of the objective validity of moral standards respectively; and there he concludes that such writers 'generally find themselves compelled, consciously or unconsciously, to reintroduce categories of value which at first they pretend to discard' (p. 255).

Such views, at a time when both the sociological and the psychological outlooks are widely prevalent, seem to me of considerable importance, and provide a measure of Professor Ginsberg's superiority to such sociologists as the late Professor Mannheim. Their relevance to our present plight hardly needs stressing. Moreover, they enable Professor Ginsberg to draw attention to certain inconsistencies in the work of other sociologists and of those working in allied social disciplines (it is part of the eclectic nature of his approach that in his view sociology 'cannot thrive without constant contact with numerous special studies such as economic history, law, morals and religion, and that its function is not only to interpret social relationships, but to study their interconnections' (p. 5). Thus he criticizes Westermarck's theories of ethical relativity and shows how certain value judgments remain implicit in Westermarck's analysis; he also shows the need, disregarded in Stammler's philosophy of law, of relating particular ends to the universal law. Indeed, any attempt at moral indifference where, for instance, legal rule is concerned, is 'illusory and if seriously insisted on must lead not to a transformation of right into might but of might into right and to deprive the notion of obligation of any meaning other than that of psychological acceptance or constraint' (p. 237). We have seen the truth of this too tragically illustrated in recent years not to heed Professor Ginsberg's warning.

It should be stressed that most of these papers confine themselves to criticisms of existing confusions; and I am so far in sympathy with Professor Ginsberg's undertakings that quotations will suffice to bring out what I regard as being of special value in his point of view. He is not an original thinker; but this seems to me to be a moment for the restatement of older and more disciplined views. Positively he has not a great deal to offer, except insofar as his views emerge from his undertakings. He suggests three criteria of social development: growing command over the conditions of life; the increase of co-operation; and a change in the character of that co-operation in the direction of human freedom. He believes that moral progress along the lines indicated has taken place; but he realises 'the

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finitude of man, the limitations of his intellectual powers and the fierceness of his passions are obvious enough to warn us that man is no god' (p. 324), and quotes with approval Renouvier's remark about the 'terrible solidarity of evil'. He cannot express the same optimism as Hobhouse regarding the extension of 'organic harmony' (*cf.* p. 55) —though in private correspondence Hobhouse himself expressed serious doubts. The events of the last decade reduce Professor Ginsberg to the tentativeness of such remarks as 'yet on balance there may be a net gain'. It is on the subject of his main hope for advance—the possibility of 'rational self-direction'—that one would have liked to have heard more from Professor Ginsberg. It seems to me that there is a certain incompatibility between this idea and the conception of the objectivity of moral values. It is to be assumed that such values have reference to the whole of human nature, once that nature has come under the complete and harmonious control of the reason. But then, as Hobhouse himself admitted, reason, on which such self-direction as is possible is based, can never comprise the whole of the mind. The ends of life, therefore, can never be completely realized nor even fully comprehended by the mind, a fact which should induce caution in all attempts at rational self-direction. Some such realization seems to lie behind the remark 'So far from the ends of life being merely given to the individual, he may spend the greater part of his life in finding out what he wants and is capable of'. What, indeed, is dangerous about the idea of self-direction lies in its being seized upon by less fastidious and careful thinkers than Professor Ginsberg and its being used as an excuse for foisting upon us inflexible and inadequately conceived plans for human development. What is important about the idea is its implicit assumption that in the extension of the power of reason lies such hope as remains to us; but it must be a reason that takes in and realizes the necessity of coming to terms with the imponderables which defy any attempt at systematization. Perhaps the most serious criticism to be urged against Professor Ginsberg's type of outlook lies in its inability (at least its expositors never succeed in conveying an adequate *emotional* realization) to apprehend adequately and to enter into coherent relationship with the type of experience represented, to take an extreme, by Heathcliff: 'You talk of her mind being unsettled. How the devil could it be otherwise in her frightful isolation? And that insipid, paltry creature attending her from *duty* and *humanity*! From *pity* and *charity*! He might as well plant an oak in a flower-pot and expect it to thrive as imagine he can restore her to vigour in the soil of his shallow cares!' The relationship of Catherine and Heathcliff provides a comment on, even if it does not ultimately invalidate, Professor Ginsberg's moral outlook: 'We cannot, I think, account for the facts of moral experience without realizing that there is implicit in it a reference to something desirable yet not necessarily desired, something which makes demands on us and which we cannot attain without tension and struggle, but which none the less is also a fulfilment of our

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nature'. The experience that lies behind *Wuthering Heights* would suggest an ambiguity in the idea of a 'fulfilment of our nature', and the possibility of a switching round of the middle phrase so that it reads 'something desired yet not necessarily desirable'. The felt inadequacy of Hobhouse's exposition of those 'intimate and sure experiences which reveal the true capabilities of the human soul' which Professor Ginsberg quotes at length (p. 58-60) and, one assumes, with approval, should not be passed over. And one notes in the essays themselves a certain tendency, on occasions, to be portentous over the obvious; the essay on German mentality, for instance, is unoriginal to the point of platitude; and one could have hoped for a more penetrating study of anti-semitism than appears here. The nature of these two essays suggests the limitations of Professor Ginsberg's mind, the inability to penetrate far below the surface of rational assessment, its failure to realise emotional complexity.

Yet these comments and reflections must not be taken to imply too serious a reservation about the importance of and the necessity for Professor Ginsberg's work. When Hobhouse received the proofs of his last book, he wrote to a friend, expressing doubts about the relevance of his humanitarian ideals to the then state of civilization; but he concluded with this address to himself: 'You'd betray your ideas if you gave up, because though a poor thing it is the best you can do. You don't express them well, but nobody else expresses them at all'. This might be applied to Professor Ginsberg's book—except that, of course, the modesty of the remarks are in no way adequate to the nature of Professor Ginsberg's achievement, at its best.

G. H. BANTOCK.

'THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY' REPRINTED

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY, Henry James (World's Classics 'Double', O.U.P. 7/-).

The Macmillan pocket-edition has long been unobtainable, so that this new 'World's Classics' volume, even if less easy to read, is a matter for gratitude. For *The Portrait of a Lady* is not only a great and brilliant novel; it belongs, where the critical study and discussion of fiction are concerned, to the list of essential texts. Its value in such use—in discussion directed at establishing the nature and procedures of intelligent criticism—is rich and diverse. For an elementary exercise, compare *The Portrait of a Lady* with *The Egoist*: there is no better way of putting Meredith (now being revived as the poet-novelist of 'high civilization') in his place. The difference between supremely intelligent art, with its genuine and functional wit and poetry, and what Meredith offers is sufficiently plain: the judgments are inevitable.

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It is only for the sake of an elementary exercise that one brings *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Egoist* together. The comparison with *Daniel Deronda* is another matter. That there is an essential relation between the two books will hardly be disputed by anyone who knows them both. James had, and retained throughout his life, an intense admiration for *Daniel Deronda*, and within three years of writing his critique of it, the 'Conversation', began *The Portrait of a Lady*. But no such extraneous knowledge is necessary to make the fact of the relation obvious to anyone in whose mind the two novels are present together. To explore that relation is to contemplate an illuminating instance of 'influence', involving two great books by very unlike authors; to open for study a central line of tradition; and to be challenged to make comparative judgments of a most delicate kind.

What James does with the Gwendolen-Grandcourt theme is highly characteristic. Gwendolen Harleth is driven into accepting Grandcourt by economic pressure, and incurs, in consequence, remorse and a painful initiation into moral maturity. James eliminates the economic pressure and the agonized conscience together. Isabel Archer, as a result of Ralph Touchett's intervention with his dying father, is made independent: Ralph, in love with her love of life, her high (if necessarily vague) expectation of it, and her self-confident vitality of the ideal American girl, wants to 'see what she will do'. Mr. Yvor Winters, in *Maule's Curse*, sees her as representing James's preoccupation with pure 'ethical sensibility': she is to make a free 'ethical choice'. Actually, of course, there is a patent irony. Ralph Touchett has to recognize that the arrangement that was to set her free for flight has made her worth acquiring, for cage-life, by the petty æsthete-egotist whom he has never thought of as capable of interesting her. Isabel herself has to recognize that when she thought she was supremely the free agent she was being made use of, and that her choice was something managed for their own convenience, and at her expense, by Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle. Further, Mr. Matthiessen, I think, is undoubtedly right in his view (see *Henry James: The Major Phase*) that James intends a more general irony—an irony directed against the optimistic idealism of the American transcendental tradition.

The weakness of the book (I have suggested, in discussing George Eliot earlier in these pages) is that this intention has lost its force in a radical ambiguity or inconsistency. James admires his American heroine too much to permit himself a clear and consistent irony. It isn't unfair to say that she behaves like a silly and wilful girl. She isn't urged into her disastrous marriage, as Gwendolen Harleth is, by the pressure of all those whom she most loves and respects. On the contrary, all Isabel Archer's friends warn her against Osmond: Ralph Touchett's quietly contemptuous placing of him should, we feel, have been sufficient. But she persists in her sublime confidence that she knows better. Yet we are not allowed to feel that the sympathy claimed for her is to have any

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critical or ironical admixture. When, after her marriage, the disastrous nature of her mistake has become generally known, she is regarded by everyone as an exalted tragic victim, an object for pure compassion; there is no hint of any qualifying criticism. In short, the implicit valuation of her that we are expected to endorse is at odds with the general ironic intention we must suppose James to have entertained.

When we ask how he can have rested in such a radical incoherence, the answer lies, I think, in his unawareness of his relation to George Eliot. He had been profoundly impressed by the irony of Gwendolen's situation after her marriage, and he failed to recognize how large a part of his 'inspiration' in *The Portrait of a Lady* was the desire to produce a similar irony. The unrecognized impulsion had a determining imaginative influence; he reproduced the ironic situation, but failed to ground it in a justifying fable. If we don't put our finger on the inconsistency at first, it is because of the way in which James works in terms of brilliant dramatic scenes, cunningly chosen; scenes done with a characteristic art, all the resources of which are devoted to satisfying us with very little in the way of inward realization of Isabel and to keeping us interested in guessing from outside what is going on inside—in trying to construct the psychological and moral substance of the action from a minimum of data.

The weakness revealed in *The Portrait of a Lady* when we focus on the heroine and ponder the theme as it immediately concerns her might seem to be fatal to the claims of the book as a work of art. It is, nevertheless, a great novel: not only is it brilliant and full of life; when all qualifications have been urged, we can still see close and coherent organization—we have still a significant whole. To produce adequate grounds for this judgment we have only to consider *The Portrait of a Lady* in its quality of Jamesian drama on the 'international theme'—for it is that; it belongs with its predecessors, *Roderick Hudson* and *The Europeans*. Its greatness is a matter of the inclusive harmony it represents—the vital poise between the diverse tendencies and impulsions that make up James's complex reaction to the interplay, in his experience, of the differing civilizations.

In Isabel Archer we have again the supremacy of the American girl; but in her we can recognize a real superiority, even if, pondering it critically, we judge it to depend on a large measure of idealization. Her freedom in the face of English conventions appears—and she is a firmly realized presence for us—as a true emancipation of spirit. Unlike Daisy Miller she has her own superior code, in her scruple, her self-respect and her sensitiveness; she is educated and highly intelligent. She is more idealized, it is true, than Bessy Alden. Nevertheless, however idealized, and whatever I may have said in comparing her with Gwendolen Harleth, she is convincing and impressive: the idealization stands for a true fineness, worthily imagined by James.

Lord Warburton, on the other hand, is very much superior to

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Lord Lambeth of *An International Episode*. He is far from stupid or impermeable to ideas ('he had a lively grey eye'), and he sees the order to which he belongs as standing for something more than precedence and privilege. In fact, that order is still in some ways idealized in *The Portrait of a Lady*, and the presentation of it has a mellow fulness that has much to do with the effect of rich beauty characterizing the book. The opening scene, on the lawn, giving us, with a ripe and subtle art that at once proclaims a great master, the old American banker and his company against the background of country-house, sets the tone. He admires and respects Lord Warburton and Lord Warburton's world, while, at the same time, the quite different standards he himself represents (he remains an American after thirty successful years in England), and the free play of mind and spirit that, with his son, he introduces into that world, constitutes an implicit criticism of it. We have here a sufficient hint at the way in which, in the total effect of the book, the idealization and the criticism are reconciled.

The admirableness of Lord Warburton and the impressiveness of his world, as we are made to feel them, are essential to the significance of Isabel's negative choice. That her rejection of them doesn't strike us as the least capricious, but as an act of radically ethical judgment, is a tribute to the reality with which James has invested her (she is *not*, we must concede, Gwendolen Harleth):

> 'At the risk of adding to the evidence of her self-sufficiency it must be said that there had been moments when this possibility of admiration by a personage represented to her an aggression almost to the degree of an affront, quite to the degree of an inconvenience. She had never yet known a personage; there had been no personages, in this sense, in her life; there were probably none such at all in her native land. When she had thought of individual eminence she had thought of it on the basis of character and wit—of what one might like in a gentleman's mind and in his talk. She herself was a character—she couldn't help being aware of that; and hitherto her visions of a completed consciousness had concerned themselves largely with moral images—things as to which the question would be whether they pleased her sublime soul. Lord Warburton loomed up before her, largely and brightly, as a collection of attributes and powers, which were not be measured by this simple rule, but which demanded a different sort of appreciation—an appreciation that the girl, with her habit of judging quickly and freely, felt she lacked the patience to bestow. He appeared to demand of her something that no one else, as it were, had presumed to do. What she felt was that a territorial, a political, a social magnate had conceived the design of drawing her into the system in which he rather invidiously lived and moved. A certain instinct, not imperious, but persuasive, told her to resist—murmured to her that, virtually, she had a system and an orbit of her own'.

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James goes on immediately to tell us that there was 'a young man lately come from America who had no system at all'. This, in the guise of Caspar Goodwood from New England, is the American business-man. He represents what America has to offer Isabel—stark unpliant integrity and self-reliant practical will, as opposed to 'system' and the civilized graces. 'His jaw was too square and set and his figure too straight and stiff: these things suggested a want of consonance with the deeper rhythms of life. But in spite of this promising description he is sentimentalized—in so far as he is 'there' at all—and he is one of the weaknesses of the book. However, the ineffectualness of the intention he stands for leaves Isabel's rejection of Lord Warburton all its significance.

This significance is beautifully intimated in such touches as the lapse (it is not unique) that Lord Warburton is guilty of on the occasion of Mrs. Touchett's forbidding Isabel to stay up alone with the gentlemen (Chapter VII):

> ' "Need I go, dear aunt? I'll come up in half an hour".
>
> ' "It is impossible I should wait for you", Mrs. Touchett answered.
>
> ' "Ah, you needn't wait! Ralph will light my candle", Isabel gaily engaged.
>
> ' "I'll light your candle; do let me light your candle, Miss Archer!" Lord Warburton exclaimed. "Only I beg it shall not be before midnight".
>
> Mrs. Touchett fixed her bright little eyes upon him a moment and transferred them to her niece'.

Warburton would not have used this tone to an English girl. Perceiving that she has the American freedom where the English *convenances* are concerned, he immediately classifies her as 'an American girl', and slips into a manner that would have been in place with Henrietta Stackpole, the bright young journalist who habitually 'walks in without knocking at the door'. It shocks us, such is the power of James's art. It shocks us more than it shocks Isabel, and it serves none the less for that to bring to a concrete point for us the rightness of her decision against him. For it reveals to us an obtuse complacency, in assuming which for a moment Lord Warburton seems to reveal the spirit of the 'system' he belongs to.

This passage has its retro-active parallel in the later exchange (Chapter X) between Ralph Touchett and Henrietta, in which he pretends, to her confusion, to think that she is making love to him. Ralph's 'lapse' doesn't matter. It merely leads us to say that he knows how to treat Henrietta, just as he knows how to treat everyone. For Ralph Touchett is the centre, the key-figure, of James's 'system'—the poise or harmony I have spoken of as characterizing *The Portrait of a Lady*. He is neither American nor English—or he is both: that is, he combines the advantages, while being free from the limitations. He can place everyone, and represents the ideal civilization that James found in no country.

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He understands why Isabella likes Henrietta, but, when told that Henrietta carries in her garments 'the strong, sweet, fresh odour' of her great country, he replies: she 'does smell of the Future—it almost knocks one down!' For her he is just another expatriate, like Osmond. And when Isabel asks the Parisian Americans, whom, in their obviousness, she *can* place, 'You all live this way, but what does it lead to?', Mrs. Touchett, placing herself, 'thought the question worthy of Henrietta Stackpole'. The discriminations, in fact, are established with beautiful precision all along the scale. Isabel herself notices that Ralph seems to resemble Osmond in having a fastidious taste—and that yet there is a difference. Ralph himself, in placing Osmond for her (she, of course, doesn't take it in, and that is the tragic irony), explains what it is: 'He has a great dread of vulgarity; that's his special line; he hasn't any other that I know of'. He places Madame Merle too—again without effect:

> ' "Ah, with Madame Merle you may go anywhere *de confiance*", said Ralph. "She knows none but the best people" '.

This will suffice to indicate the kind of essential organization that makes *The Portrait of a Lady*, for all the critical points I made about it in discussing George Eliot, a great book. Its greatness derives from his peculiar genius and experience, and it embodies an organization of his vital interests. These interests inform everything in it: the wit, the dialogue, the plot, the characterization.

The creative wealth of the book is all distinctively Jamesian. Madame Merle, for instance, couldn't have been done by George Eliot. The vision here is Isabel's, who hasn't yet seen through her:

> 'She had become too flexible, too useful, was too ripe and too final. She was in a word too perfectly the social animal that man and woman are supposed to have been intended to be; and she had rid herself of every remnant of that tonic wildness which we may assume to have belonged even to the most amiable persons in the ages before country-house life was the fashion. Isabel found it difficult to think of her in any detachment or privacy, she existed only in her relations, direct or indirect, with her fellow-mortals. One might wonder what commerce she could possibly hold with her own spirit. One always ended, however, by feeling that a charming surface doesn't necessarily prove one superficial; this was an illusion in which, in one's youth, one had but just escaped being nourished. Madame Merle was not superficial—not she. She was deep . . . '.

She represents, that is, a social 'civilization' ('the great round world itself') that is not of the kind James himself is after (just as she is, with Osmond, the complete expatriate who has none of the American virtues). Then there is Mrs. Touchett, who reminds us of an American type we meet in some of Lawrence's best work (*St. Mawr*, for instance). James presents her with his characteristic

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wit—which, as I have said, is no mere surface-habit of expression: 'The edges of her conduct were so very clear-cut that for susceptible persons it sometimes had a knife-like effect'. Henrietta Stackpole is another American type, perfectly done—marvellously escaping the effect of caricature, and remaining for all her portentous representativeness, sufficiently sympathetic. Then there is Osmond's sister, the Countess Gemini, 'a lady who had so mismanaged her improprieties that they had ceased to hang together at all . . . and had become the mere floating fragments of a wrecked renown, incommoding social circulation', and who would plunge into a lucid conversation 'as a poodle plunges after a thrown stick'.

The Countess Gemini, though so well done, is a weakness in the book, in the sense that she is too simply there to serve as a piece of machinery. She alone can reveal to Isabel the clandestine relations of Osmond and Madame Merle, and the fact that Pansy is their daughter, and she is given no sufficient motives for performing the service. Pansy herself raises the question of James's attitude toward the pure protected *jeune fille* (the 'blank page'), a type to which he seems curiously drawn. In *The Awkward Age* he shows the good little Aggie, the foil to Nanda, developing after marriage into something approaching, at the level of Edwardian smart society, a vulgar trollop: and we readily accept the implication that, in such a *milieu*, the development follows naturally out of such 'innocence'. In *The Ambassadors* he seems to confirm this implication by giving the decidedly not innocent Madame Vionnet another carefully guarded 'blank page' for daughter.

Though Pansy serves obvious functions as machinery in the relations between Isabel and Osmond, her presence in the book has, in addition, some point. As a representative figure, 'the white flower of cultivated sweetness', she pairs in contrast with Henrietta Stackpole, the embodiment of a quite different innocence—a robust American innocence that thrives on free exposure to the world. She brings us, in fact, to the general observation that almost all the characters can be seen to have, in the same way, their values and significances in a total scheme. For though *The Portrait of a Lady* is on so much larger a scale than *The Europeans*, and because of its complexity doesn't invite the description of 'moral fable', it is similarly organized: it is all intensely significant. It offers no largesse of irrelevant 'life'; its vitality is wholly that of art.

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